



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 37th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 25 June 2001

Lundi 25 juin 2001

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 25 June 2001

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 25 juin 2001

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): The constituents of St Paul's have expressed to me their outrage with the wrongs done to them by the Harris government. Whether it be home care service, drug coverage or just being treated with dignity and respect, Ontario's seniors deserve better.

One constituent writes me of his 94-year-old aunt who is seeing her three hours of home care a week being reduced to effectively nothing. He writes, "It is not moral to treat our elderly this way, certainly not when we receive \$200 cheques from the government and hear talk of more tax cuts. 'Yours to discover' indeed," he writes.

Another senior writes to express outrage over the statements by the Premier with respect to seniors being grateful to be living in the province of Ontario. She writes, "I'm extremely revolted at [Mike Harris's] attitude. It is unbelievable that the man could be so lacking not only in common sense but compassion and human understanding ... " Seniors, "the very people who built this city, who are responsible for paying taxes to develop everything that's in the city, now need help" and Mike Harris is "going to cut them off," the constituent writes.

Another senior writes demanding a public apology from the Premier, and has written the Premier demanding that apology for his statements with respect to seniors.

We all know that the Harris government did not campaign in 1995 or 1999 on restricting seniors' access to the drug plan. We all know here that it's going to end up costing more money at the end of the day if we put people off drug therapies and put people in hospitals quicker and sicker.

I'll tell you, the seniors of this province are not going to forget what this government did to them, and I intend to ensure that this government is held to account for the shabby treatment of seniors in this province.

CANADA DAY FESTIVITIES
IN DURHAM

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'd like to invite the people of Ontario to take part in one or more of Canada

Day festivities taking place in my riding this Sunday in Durham.

In Orono village, festivities will begin following the traditional cake-cutting ceremony in Orono Park. In addition to the usual fun and games, the Clarington Concert Band will be performing for a very large crowd, while over in Bowmanville, children and adults alike will be enjoying a celebration at the Bowmanville Museum. In Port Perry there are many entertaining activities planned for the day, and in the evening in beautiful Palmer Park along the shores of Lake Scugog, following ceremonies by several musical acts in the park and bandshell, there will be the traditional fireworks display at the end of the evening.

One of Port Perry's residents will be presented this year with Port Perry's Citizen of the Year Award during the festivities. This year's recipient is local businesswoman and new president of the Scugog Chamber of Commerce Ms JoAnne Cerovich. Ms Cerovich has done much for the community. This is a well-deserved award during this International Year of the Volunteer.

I want to thank the many people for their volunteerism and hard work with these three events: John Fletcher, Dan Banting, Fred Haines, and of course the staff of Bowmanville Museum.

Our Canada Day is a day for celebrating with family, friends, and fun. I suggest that everyone take a few minutes this Canada Day to reflect on how fortunate we are to live in a country that is the envy of the world. To the men and women of the branches of the Royal Canadian Legion and veterans in my riding of Durham in Ontario, thank you for all that you've done in making Canada a free country that will benefit all of us today.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): Since this Parliament assembled, I and my Liberal colleagues have been petitioning the government of Ontario to provide adequate, fair and reasonable travel grants to northern Ontario residents forced to travel for medical care. I have read petitions carrying thousands upon thousands of signatures from residents from all over Algoma-Manitoulin, from all over northern Ontario and across all of Ontario asking that this program be improved and be fair.

The travel grant program is about access. It is about ensuring that northern Ontario residents can access health services as equally as southern Ontario residents. It is

about removing a significant barrier to quality health care in northern Ontario.

The program has been grossly unfair when compared to the treatment of southern Ontario patients who have found it necessary to travel to northern Ontario. The Ombudsman of Ontario has found that the program is clearly discriminatory.

It is now way past time that the Harris government act to remove the increasingly significant distance barrier to northern Ontario working families. It is time to appropriately compensate northerners for necessary health travel. It is time for Mike Harris to recognize that northerners must receive equality.

Mr Harris, it's time.

PAYUKOTAYNO HEALTH SERVICES LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): You might have heard on CBC Radio and other news outlets over the last week that there has been a strike at Payukotayno Health Services up in Moosonee, which services all the health care needs across the James Bay coast.

What's particularly notable about this strike is the reaction of the executive director or the board in regard to how they have been dealing with the employees. We found out this morning that 10 individuals who work for Payukotayno have been fired as a result of what is a labour dispute. I'm calling upon the minister responsible for social services, the Minister of Health and Minister of Labour to investigate, because from what I'm being told from within the community the issue is not money but actually a conflict that exists between the employees and the executive director. If this is the case, I'm asking for the ministers to intervene to clear the atmosphere at Payukotayno so that we can get back to what is important, and that is providing services for the Mushkegowuk people of Timmins-James Bay.

I say again, I ask both the minister responsible for social services and the Minister of Labour, as well as the Minister of Health, to investigate and to see if indeed the assertions that are being made to me are the fact, that the executive director has somehow gone out of control up in Moose Factory.

GREAT LAKES HERITAGE COAST

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I rise today to speak about the Great Lakes heritage coast initiative at the Ministry of Natural Resources, a project I was proud to lead while I was parliamentary assistant there.

An extensive public consultation process was launched in January 2000 in communities located along the heritage coast, from Thunder Bay to Port Severn on Georgian Bay. I was thoroughly impressed with what I heard. In addition to sustaining the area's scenic natural values and cultural heritage, people recommended exploring economic opportunities in innovative ways to promote the Great Lakes heritage coast as an inter-

national tourist destination while protecting its ecological values. The love local residents share for the uniqueness and beauty of this area is really extraordinary.

A discussion paper on the findings was launched in August 2000, and I understand a further announcement will be taking place in the near future. My recommendations for the future of the Great Lakes heritage coast will be unveiled at that time.

I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank local governments, First Nations, community organizations and residents of this magnificent part of Ontario for their insight, time and hospitality during the consultative process. The Premier's vision of Ontario's Living Legacy is being realized through this project. We are protecting and promoting a beautiful part of Ontario for future generations.

My special thanks go to the Minister of Natural Resources for giving me the opportunity to lead the project under his guidance. The benefits of Ontario's Living Legacy will be realized for all Ontarians.

ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES LEGISLATION

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My statement today is to the Minister of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation.

Minister, you may not be aware, but in 1995 Mike Harris committed to passing an Ontarians with Disabilities Act in his first term. I am therefore appalled when I read your business plan for 2001-02 to find what is not stated in your plan about providing this bill to protect the rights of those with disabilities. This indeed has been a promise made and a promise broken by this government. The government in fact has refused to support my private member's resolution that would simply require the Premier to meet with Ontarians with disabilities. In this business plan, there are very vague references to removing the barriers to those with disabilities. This government is erecting more barriers, and erecting them faster than they are removing them. There is absolutely nothing in here with a fine timeline commitment.

Appallingly, the one concrete proposal made by your ministry is to implement a Web page. For Ontarians with disabilities receiving \$930 a month it is ludicrous to think they can afford the Internet time or indeed afford to purchase a computer for it. They require something concrete. There is no commitment in this plan whatsoever, and it is a disgrace and a betrayal of one and a half million Ontario citizens.

Minister, I urge you to keep the Premier's promise and implement a meaningful act now.

1340

LANDFILL

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): Last week this House saw the shameful display of the Liberal Leader of

the Opposition trying to play politics with a very serious issue. As usual, though, he still couldn't get it right.

Last summer the Minister of the Environment committed to closing the Keele Valley dump in 2002, and 12 months later the Liberal Party sees the light and tries to pretend that their bill is adequate. In fact, it might actually be worse than allowing the dump to stay open. Certainly our government's standing commitment is far better than the status quo and better than Mr McGuinty's passing fancy.

My constituents and the people of Vaughan-King-Aurora have made it perfectly clear to both the late Al Palladini and me that they wanted the dump closed.

The Liberal Party took 16 years to take a position on the Keele Valley dump. Last October, the Liberal position was to not extend the Keele Valley dump. Now, in the middle of a by-election, they change their position. Our position was, and remains, clear: to close the Keele Valley dump by 2002.

Mr McGuinty's bill, clearly written by the Liberal Vaughan-King-Aurora by-election campaign staff, is worse than inadequate. As the Minister of the Environment pointed out, it doesn't allow for environmental remediation, for dealing with erosion or for new fences. This bill, like Mr McGuinty, is not up to the job.

NORTHERN CANCER TREATMENT

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Enough is enough. Gerry Lougheed Jr, Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care, in fact all northerners, want the Mike Harris government to act, and act now.

At a news conference earlier on today, Gerry Lougheed Jr, representing all Ontarians who believe that this government is practising health care apartheid, asked for three things: (1) he wants northern cancer patients who have been discriminated against to be reimbursed for their costs to fight this dreaded disease; (2) within 15 days he wants Mike Harris to release the policy document he has in his possession with regard to the travel grant; and (3) within 30 days OSECC, Gerry Lougheed Jr and all Ontarians want the Premier or his health minister to sit down with OSECC to plan out a strategy which will work for the people of Ontario. In fact, what Gerry Lougheed Jr, Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care and all Ontarians want is that this government finally right the wrong that has been found to be relevant and prevalent in Ontario.

Discrimination must stop. Health care apartheid must stop. It is time for this government to right the wrong. Enough is enough.

ROUGE VALLEY HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): I once again rise to pay tribute to the nurses, doctors, staff and volunteers of the Rouge Valley Health System.

In 1995, when our government was first elected, our health care system was deteriorating after 10 years of

Liberal and NDP mismanagement. For our predecessors the solution was to ignore problems, shuffle resources and close 10,000 beds. The Harris government took a different path by increasing funding, providing resources for capital improvements and bringing services closer to the people who use them.

Last week I was pleased to attend the grand opening of the Transamerica Life Breast Screening and Diagnostic Centre located at the Centenary site of the Rouge Valley Health System.

The centre is an important tool in helping women of east Toronto and western Durham assure their long-term health. The early detection and treatment of breast cancer will ensure that more often than not this terrible disease will be beaten. Their goal is a 24-hour turnaround time on the testing of biopsies and an under-two-week turnaround time for the treatment.

I would like to thank Transamerica Life, who helped make the centre a reality with a very generous donation. While others believe it's fashionable to criticize private enterprise when they contribute to the community, I would like to thank them for helping bring services closer to the people of Scarborough and west Durham.

Since 1995 I have had the privilege of announcing record funding at that hospital, the expansion of cardiac care services, the addition of a level II pediatric centre and, most recently, the support for a brand new state-of-the-art MRI. The addition of the Transamerica Life Breast Screening and Diagnostic Centre is another success story for all of the nurses, doctors, staff and volunteers who work so hard to make the Rouge Valley Health System one of the finest medical facilities in the province.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to give second and third readings to Bill 66, An Act to amend the Wilfrid Laurier University Act, 1973.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? I'm afraid I heard some noes.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): On Thursday, June 21, the member for Windsor-St Clair rose on a point of privilege concerning the report of the Environmental Commissioner, tabled on that day, entitled Broken Promises: MNR's Failure to Safeguard Environmental Rights. I have carefully reviewed the Environmental Commissioner's report, the member's written submission and the comments in this House by Minister of Natural Resources.

The member for Windsor-St Clair alleges that the Environmental Commissioner, as evidenced by what he had to say in his report, has been impeded and obstructed in the performance of his duties and that this alleged obstruction represents a contempt of the Legislature. The member went further in saying, "When an officer of the Legislature such as the Environmental Commissioner is

obstructed from performing his or her duty, as has been seriously alleged by that commissioner today, it is a serious breach, in our view, of our privileges as members to have access to his reports, which we, by law, must have access to.”

First let me say, having read the commissioner’s report, that my view is he in fact does not allege he has been obstructed in performing his duties. The Environmental Commissioner expresses a very high level of frustration with the fact that the Minister of Natural Resources had not yet “classified its instruments,” a term that has a specific meaning within the Environmental Bill of Rights, but he does not at any point directly or indirectly assert that the ministry has obstructed or attempted to obstruct the performance of his functions or that the ministry has in way tried to frustrate or hinder the Environmental Commissioner from performing his statutory duty.

While the commissioner reports findings that are critical of the ministry, none of his statements contain or equate to an assertion that the ministry has obstructed the Environmental Commissioner. Indeed, in making these findings and reporting them to the Legislature, the Environmental Commissioner has specifically fulfilled his role, which the commissioner indicated himself in the report, and the member for Windsor-St Clair also noted in his submission, is to review how provincial ministries carry out the requirements of the EBR and to report to the Legislative Assembly.

Again, by my reading of all the material before me, the Environmental Commissioner simply has not made the allegation of obstruction that the member for Windsor-St Clair asserts. I therefore find that a prima facie case of contempt has not been made out.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR LA QUALITÉ ET LA SALUBRITÉ DES ALIMENTS

Mr Coburn moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 87, An Act to regulate food quality and safety and to make complementary amendments and repeals to other Acts / Projet de loi 87, Loi visant à réglementer la qualité et la salubrité des aliments, à apporter des modifications complémentaires à d’autres lois et à en abroger d’autres.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The Minister of Agriculture for a short statement?

Hon Brian Coburn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I’ll defer until ministers’ statements.

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN ACT, 2001 LOI DE 2001 SUR L’ÉCOLE D’ART ET DE DESIGN DE L’ONTARIO

Mrs Cunningham moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to revise The Ontario College of Art Act, 1968-69 / Projet de loi 88, Loi révisant la loi intitulée The Ontario College of Art Act, 1968-69.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The minister for a short statement?

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, minister responsible for women’s issues): The purpose of this bill is to offer opportunities for graduates of the Ontario College of Art and Design by allowing the college to grant degrees.

The undergraduate and graduate degree has become the standard academic qualification in professional fine art and design programs. When this legislation is passed, OCAD students will receive a credential that more accurately reflects the level of education they have received. The degree programs which would be offered by the college have been assessed by an expert and independent academic panel. They have been found to meet or exceed academic standards for similar programs in Ontario and North America.

The amendments we are bringing forward today will help to bring OCAD and its students the recognition they need to succeed in a competitive world.

RESPECT FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR LE RESPECT DES VICTIMES D’ACTES CRIMINELS

Mr Bryant moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to provide for the respectful treatment of victims of crime / Projet de loi 89, Loi prévoyant le traitement respectueux des victimes d’actes criminels.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul’s): This bill provides for mandatory, enforceable rights for victims. The crown counsel must give victims a reasonable opportunity to have admissible evidence concerning the impact of a crime presented to the court before sentencing; as well, the provision of information of victims concerning the structures and operation of the justice system, victims’ services, the freedom of information and privacy act, and compensation for victims of crime in this act are to be mandatory. As long as the provision of specific information doesn’t prejudice an investigation, victims must be provided with information concerning an offence, upon request, and victims have the opportunity to apply to the Office for Victims of Crime for redress of

complaints regarding treatment and adherence to victims' rights legislation.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education, Government House Leader): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(ii), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to midnight on Monday, June 25, Tuesday, June 26, and Wednesday, June 27, 2001, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1353 to 1358.

The Speaker: Would the members kindly take their seats.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Gilchrist, Steve	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bartolucci, Rick	Gill, Raminder	Parsons, Ernie
Beaubien, Marcel	Guzzo, Garry J.	Patten, Richard
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hardeman, Ernie	Peters, Steve
Bradley, James J.	Hastings, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bryant, Michael	Hodgson, Chris	Pupatello, Sandra
Caplan, David	Hoy, Pat	Runciman, Robert W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Johns, Helen	Sampson, Rob
Clement, Tony	Johnson, Bert	Sergio, Mario
Coburn, Brian	Kells, Morley	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Kwinter, Monte	Snobelen, John
Conway, Sean G.	Levac, David	Spina, Joseph
Cordiano, Joseph	Marland, Margaret	Sterling, Norman W.
Crozier, Bruce	Maves, Bart	Stewart, R. Gary
Cunningham, Dianne	Mazzilli, Frank	Stockwell, Chris
Curling, Alvin	McLeod, Lyn	Tascona, Joseph N.
Di Cocco, Caroline	McMeekin, Ted	Tilson, David
Duncan, Dwight	Molinari, Tina R.	Tsubouchi, David H.
Dunlop, Garfield	Munro, Julia	Turnbull, David
Ecker, Janet	Murdoch, Bill	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Elliott, Brenda	Mushinski, Marilyn	Witmer, Elizabeth
Galt, Doug	Newman, Dan	Wood, Bob
Gerretsen, John	O'Toole, John	Young, David

The Speaker: All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Martel, Shelley
Hampton, Howard		

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 69; the nays are 4.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On a point of order, Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent—I just want the government House leader to be aware of this—for the Legislature to sit the first two weeks of July.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? I heard some noes, and I think some of them were from the table, actually. Just kidding. I did hear some noes, but they were members.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Before we continue, I am pleased to inform the members of the Legislative Assembly that we have with us today in the Speaker's gallery His Excellency Quang Thanh Trinh, ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to Canada. Please join in welcoming our special guest.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY LEGISLATION

Hon Brian Coburn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): A few moments ago I introduced for first reading the proposed food safety and quality legislation.

Development of this proposed legislation has truly been a team effort. In addition to my ministry's lead role, both the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Natural Resources have played an integral part in its development. We are all proud of this bill that would help to ensure that the people of Ontario continue to enjoy a safe food supply based on an economically viable agri-food industry.

Early in 1999, we identified a need to modernize our food safety system and established the Ontario food safety system review. Our food was, and continues to be, safe. In fact, Ontario has an enviable food safety record. But over the years our eating habits have changed, different types of food are available and more widely distributed and there are new food hazards. Governments around the world have been taking a critical look at how both the public and private sectors can ensure the continued safety of the food supply. Our food safety system review showed us that to do this in Ontario, we need to take advantage of new science and technology and modernize our food safety systems.

Food is essential to sustain life, and while safe food is no guarantee of good health, consuming food that is unsafe will result in undesirable effects that may range from short-term discomfort to chronic health problems.

Avoiding unnecessary costs incurred as a result of food-borne illness is one way of ensuring continued

economic prosperity and enhanced public health in Ontario.

Everyone along the food system continuum has a role to play in food safety: producers, processors and even consumers. At the farm level, sustainable production practices are needed to ensure safe food. Moving along that continuum, food processors must engage in practices designed to minimize food safety risks. As the last link in the chain, consumers have an obligation to prepare, handle and serve food safely.

The proposed Food Safety and Quality Act will help Ontario achieve these goals.

The introduction of this legislation is just one part of the food safety system review. We have already established several new programs that have improved the safety of Ontario's food supply.

For example, in 1999 we took advantage of new technology and began using a computerized information system for our meat and livestock inspection areas. This state-of-the-art system has allowed for massive amounts of data from audits, lab testing and inspection reports to be more readily accessible for risk management purposes.

On the horticultural side, last year we conducted a province-wide survey of apple juice and cider producers. As a result of that survey, microbiological testing and educational programs are now in place, and standards for apple juice and cider are being developed in consultation with the industry to further ensure the safety and quality of these products.

In 1999, we established the healthy futures for Ontario agriculture program. Among other things, this successful program provides funding for the agri-food industry to enhance the safety and quality of Ontario food products. As part of healthy futures, funding and access to technical expertise are available to help our agri-food sector maintain and expand its capacity to meet domestic and export market demands with regard to food safety and quality.

We are also an active participant in the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education, working diligently to educate consumers about their role in food safety. The proposed Food Safety and Quality Act provides the legislative backbone for a science- and risk-based food safety system. New science and technology have provided us with effective means of proactively identifying food safety risks along the food chain. By having the ability to identify hazards quickly, appropriate measures can be applied to minimize them before they pose a risk to public health.

We can improve the safety of our food by identifying potential hazards and minimizing the risks. If passed, this legislation would allow us to use this new information to better respond to food safety threats. At the same time that we are putting in place a more effective, world-class food safety and quality system, we are also simplifying and clarifying government legislation surrounding all or part of six current food-related statutes: the Dead Animal Disposal Act, the Edible Oil Products Act, the Farm Products Grades and Sales Act, the Livestock and

Livestock Products Act, the Meat Inspection Act, and the Fish Inspection Act. By bringing the food safety and quality requirements of these acts together under one umbrella, the consolidated act would establish a common approach and consistent standards for the safety and quality of our food.

At the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, it is our responsibility to work with the agri-food industry to enhance its ability to produce safe food. We must also ensure consumer confidence in the food safety systems. To this end, as I had indicated earlier, we have worked closely with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care during the development of this bill, and they will maintain the highest authority on public health issues. The proposed act requires that all food safety risks be reported to a medical officer of health. Our partnerships with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Natural Resources establish important built-in checks and balances for Ontario's food safety system.

The bill I have introduced today would modernize and strengthen the framework of this system and the food safety expertise and inspection and enforcement activities of each ministry, and provide an efficient and effective means of delivering programs to ensure public food safety.

This bill was developed after extensive consultation with our stakeholders, including commodity groups, food processors, general farm organizations, public health workers, government ministries, and consumer education representatives.

1410

During the consultations it was apparent that there was widespread agreement that the proposed act would provide the basis for improved food safety, increased food safety assurance and a higher level of consumer confidence.

Stakeholders told us that the act and its regulations should be scientifically based. Science is developing in leaps and bounds, and we agree we need to use new information and technologies available to us to increase the safety of our food supply. Modern, science-based food safety requirements can have economic benefits for producers, such as reduced farm inputs, increased production and expanded market access.

Stakeholders told us that the proposed act should be flexible and transparent. The broad nature of the legislation allows for maximum flexibility while regulations are developed, and provides for improved information sharing and updated inspection and investigation methods. We heard that the act should support industry food safety programs and should harmonize with national and international standards. We are committed to this, not only to ensure safe food for the people of Ontario but also to open new markets for Ontario producers and processors.

A consolidated modern food safety act would support the overall competitiveness of Ontario's agri-food industry and would allow it to maintain an increased market share both domestically and internationally.

Under the proposed act, the food safety and quality requirements of the current six food-related acts would be modified to include standards and requirements that will minimize public health risks from food-borne hazards; quality standards to promote the marketing of Ontario products; appropriate enforcement actions to ensure compliance; and a new authority to ensure a timely and effective response to a food safety crisis, including the ability to trace back to find the source of a contaminated food and to trace forward to determine where it has been distributed.

If the Food Safety and Quality Act passed, it would provide the people of Ontario with an all-encompassing framework. Once created, we can, in consultation with our stakeholders, develop the framework that provides clear, strong, science-based regulations that will ensure the people of Ontario continue to have a safe food supply.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Responses?

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): To the Minister of Agriculture today, congratulations on introducing a second piece of legislation which for the most part is very much an empty-shell piece of legislation. What we've seen previously with the nutrient management legislation and what we saw today is legislation put in place with the most important aspect of that legislation lacking: the regulations. I can put the minister on notice right now, and all government members, that we'll be monitoring closely the consultations that take place this summer and we will be following your consultation tour around.

Minister, it's very interesting to hear you talk about working with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Natural Resources, but there's one ministry you failed to mention, and that's the Ministry of the Environment. Even in this piece of legislation here today, when you start looking under definitions and it starts talking about manure and other biosolids being used as agricultural inputs, those are issues that need to be dealt with in conjunction with the Ministry of the Environment. There is a failure of any mention of the Ministry of the Environment here.

Both pieces of legislation, this and the nutrient management legislation, we know are of utmost importance to the well-being of the health and safety of all Ontario's citizens. Both pieces of legislation are extremely crucial to the economic viability of the agricultural industry in this province. But again we're lacking many details: details to come in regulations.

It's important to go on the record to say that, very strangely, this legislation that we've heard talked about for a long period of time has suddenly and miraculously appeared, just as the government is about to appear before the Walkerton hearings to become and remain accountable for what they've done to hurt the industry in this province.

It's one thing to have the legislation in place, but again, much like the nutrient management legislation that we saw previously, there's no financial commitment in

here. We've witnessed with this government in the area of investigations alone that up until last fall there had only been four investigators in the whole of the province. It wasn't until the media started to raise the issue of illegal abattoirs in the fall of 2000 that another investigator was added.

It's interesting too that when you look at the number of inspectors, in 1993 there were 130 inspectors inspecting the meat industry in this province. There were 50 less in the year 2000; we're down to 80 inspectors. You're talking about the importance of food safety and what you want to do, but you're not backing it up with the resources that are sorely needed. When you look at the resources and at how the budget in this area has fallen since the election of the Mike Harris government, this government that promised no cuts to agriculture, we've seen the budget fall in this area of food inspection and food safety from \$12.5 million to \$7 million.

They talk about how they're going to step up enforcement. Between 1996 and the year 2000, do you know what the Harris government's record was in the area of convictions? Eighteen convictions in a period of four years. It's very clear that this ministry, which was promised there would be no cuts to agriculture, has seen unprecedented and drastic cuts implemented and inflicted on it. Now what we're seeing is the ministry having to do damage control to fix all the mistakes that were caused by Mr Harris and his members, who said, "No cuts to agriculture." I think that's a real disgrace. We know the public is concerned about this issue, but this government seems to ride with the wave of whatever the media is saying. It wasn't until the media and their exposés in the meat industry that we saw any concrete action from this government.

Let's deal with the animal health lab at the University of Guelph. The animal health lab has seen its ability to maintain antibiotic resistance drop. It has seen its ability to conduct surveillance on emerging animal diseases drop. More and more we've seen reliance on stakeholders and the private sector. Even today the minister talked about the private sector. These are important to all the people of Ontario and shouldn't be left to the private sector to deal with.

I want to make a comment on behalf of John Cleary, the critic responsible for dealing with the dead stock issue. My colleague Mr Cleary has raised this issue numerous times in this Legislature and this government has totally disregarded the warnings Mr Cleary put forward. I want to compliment Mr Cleary on his efforts.

Minister, we look forward to the consultations. We will be there, we will be following and we will be watching.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I rise in regard to standing order 35(c). The statement delivered to me, to which I was to respond today, was substantially different from that delivered by the minister. It made it extremely diffi-

cult to respond when I started to hear other statements being made that I wasn't privy to prior to the minister rising in the House.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Excuse me while I consult with the Clerk.

I thank the member for his comments. Standing order 35(c) says, "Two copies of each ministerial statement shall be delivered to the leaders of recognized opposition parties, or their representatives, at or before the time the statement is made in the House." Apparently this has come up with Speakers before. I believe in 1992 Speaker Warner ruled that it is not the Speaker's duty to decide what will be in the statement. Having said that, I would think that in most cases ministers should give a speech to an opposition member.

There may be some occasions when something comes up late, as it often will, that could be added. In the future, if something like that does occur, possibly what the minister could do is just mention there has been a little bit of a change, because I suspect the statements may change up until the time they are read. In the spirit of co-operation, I would ask all members to try to the best of their ability to get this speech so all members could follow along.

Having said that, I do understand that on some occasions it will arise that that can't be done. To make it fair for everybody, if the minister could just indicate that, that would help the critics in their responsibilities. I thank the member for his point of order.

Just before we begin question period, the member for Scarborough East, Mr Gilchrist, has provided—

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Speaker, I believe I have a response as well.

The Speaker: I'm sorry; I apologize. Leader of the third party.

1420

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY LEGISLATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Speaker, it's quite interesting to see, once again, the government introduce legislation that is frankly necessary to address something this government has created.

This is the government that in its first few months as a government said, "You know, we really don't need those people out there inspecting any longer," and so you laid off a number of the inspectors who were supposed to be inspecting provincially regulated abattoirs. I remember the then Minister of Agriculture saying, "We don't need these food inspectors." Then the next step, after you laid off a large number of inspectors, was that you took a number of other inspection positions and simply contracted them to outside organizations with absolutely nothing in place to ensure that food standards were going to be met, nothing in place to ensure they were going to meet certain standards.

That's the scenario this government created. Added to that scenario is the fact that you reduced the Minister of

Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs by \$200 million a year on an operating basis. That's \$200 million a year that used to be available to ensure proper food inspection actually happened. But you did away with that. That was unnecessary.

Protecting our food and ensuring that food safety standards were met wasn't important. What was important was that you find the money to finance tax cuts for your well-off friends. We've seen from Walkerton what happens when you ignore basic issues like the safety and reliability of our drinking water, the safety and reliability of the food we eat. We've learned through hard lessons what happens when your priority is to give tax cuts to your well-off friends at the expense of safe drinking water and safe food for the population of Ontario.

The government now understands there is a problem—a problem they've created. So they bring in this legislation. But I want people to read the fine print. In the statement that was given today, and in the legislation, nowhere are there provisions that are going to require that the ministry of agriculture and food once again have the expertise and the people in the field to do these food inspections.

This is a bit like Ronald Reagan. When environmental disasters started to happen in the United States, Ronald Reagan would pass legislation but then ensure there was nothing in place to enforce the legislation. That's what we have here. The government finally acknowledges there's a big problem, a serious problem with respect to food safety, and so they're going to bring in this legislation. They make a big deal of announcing it. They spin out about a seven-page document in terms of media spin. But when you read the fine print, there is no money to do the inspecting, no money to hire the inspecting expertise, no money for the operational administration that would have to happen to support this.

So I say to people across Ontario: as the result of this legislation alone, can you have any greater assurance that food is safe? No, because there's no provision for inspection. Can you have any assurance that those provincially licensed abattoirs are in fact going to be inspected? No, because there's no provision to put the inspectors in place.

I'm sad to say this, but I think what we have here is another exercise in media spin. Make an announcement, hope that the public thinks the problem has gone away, hope that the media will give you a headline or two, and then hunker down and hope that nothing happens.

That won't do. This government is taking risks with food safety across this province. You've been taking risks with food safety for five years now. If you're really serious about this, stand in your place today, Minister, and tell us that the inspectors who were laid off, the inspections that were contracted out to outside agencies, will be there again, will be adequately funded, that you'll have the expertise to do the food safety inspections that need to happen.

If you can't give people that assurance—no, that guarantee—today, then this is nothing more than media spin, and it doesn't deal with the real problem.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The member for Scarborough East, Mr Gilchrist, has provided me with a written notice of a point of privilege, as required by standing order 21(c). I would like to thank the member for giving me sufficient time to review the matter, and I wish to advise that I will be dealing with this matter directly without hearing further from the member, as standing order 21(d) permits me to do.

The member's point of privilege concerns a press release issued by the member for St Paul's, which advises of his intention to introduce a bill. The member for Scarborough East takes issue with the language of the press release, asserting, "Not only does it imply that he has already introduced this bill, it also implies that the bill is law and binding on the government."

I'm sure the member will appreciate that the Speaker is not in a position to require compliance by all members to any sort of format on press releases. On a specific point alleging that the press release prejudiced the course of debate in this Legislature, my reading of it leads me to a view that it is in fact substantially prospective in nature and is not offensive on that ground.

I do not find that the press release tramples upon the rights of the members enjoyed in this chamber, and therefore a prima facie case of privilege has not been made out. I thank the member.

STANDING ORDERS

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): On a point of order, Speaker: It's unfortunate that I have to rise on a point of order in regard to section 97 of our standing orders.

I would say to you that section 97 deals with written questions, and in section (a) it says, "Questions seeking information from the ministry relating to the public affairs of the province may be placed ... on the Orders and Notices paper."

I have placed nine such questions on the Orders and Notices paper; in fact, these particular questions were placed April 24. Now our standing orders are very clear, Speaker. They say in 97(d), "The minister shall," and it is not the minister's ability, whether or not he or she wishes, to answer; it says, "shall answer such written questions within 24 sitting days."

It has been well beyond 24 sitting days and, Speaker, as you would know, I placed these selfsame questions on the order paper back in December of last year. Of course, the House was prorogued by the Premier and so this is a new Parliament. It has been well past the 24-day period.

The standing orders go on, "unless he or she"—the minister—"indicates that more time is required because the answer will be costly or time-consuming or that he or she declines to answer, in which case a notation shall be made on the Orders and Notices paper following the question indicating that the minister has made an interim answer, the approximate date that the information will be

available, or that the minister has declined to answer, as the case may be."

Very interesting, Speaker. When you read the Orders and Notices paper, there is no answer. There is nothing from this particular minister, from this government, about legitimate questions that have been placed for that ministry, for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

I want to reference section 1 of our standing orders. Section 1 is the conduct of business. Section 1(b)(iii) says, "to hold the government accountable for its policies." That is the first section of these standing orders, where we are discharged to hold the government accountable.

Our standing orders are very specific. They say that the minister shall make a reply, and you in your capacity, Speaker, are charged with the duty to enforce our standing orders. There is no latitude given for ministers to simply ignore the standing orders of this House. I would suggest that this constitutes a contempt of our standing orders and a contempt of our House.

Interjection.

Mr Caplan: I hear a member from across the way say, "We should change the wording of the standing orders." That's happened twice. This particular government, as governments before them, did in fact change the standing orders. This section—section 97—was specifically changed and it was put in this form and now it is reprehensible, in my opinion, for the minister to ignore this. So, Speaker, I ask you for a ruling on this matter. I ask you to enforce the standing orders of this House.

1430

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I thank the member for his very valid point of order. All ministries will know that the standing orders are very clear, and I would ask in this case I believe the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, who is here today, and I'm sure he will take note. There is in fact a standing order which says that they will be replied to, and I'm sure the minister who is sitting here today will hear your very valid point of order and, hopefully, the answers will be forthcoming.

I say to all ministries that it is very clear that the standing orders do have this procedure in place for the members to ask those questions and, when they aren't complied with, the ministries are not complying with the standing order.

I thank the member for his valid point of order and I'm hopeful that the minister will take his words here today and get a reply back to the member. I thank him very much for his participation here today.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Health. I have a copy in my hand here of a story which is just fresh off the

wire. It's less than an hour old and it describes in some detail some of the testimony delivered today by Dr Richard Schabas, the former chief medical officer of health for Ontario. In this testimony he describes a particular meeting he had when he attended the policy and priorities committee, cabinet's most powerful committee, chaired by the Premier.

He describes how he was there to issue a warning about some of the problems connected with downloading public health on to municipalities. He describes the result of this meeting. He says a deputy minister approached him, tapped him on the shoulder and said, "The Premier doesn't want you here for this discussion." He said he told Harris directly across the table that these were important issues and that it was important that the viewpoint of public health be heard. "The Premier looked at me ... and then he turned away," Schabas said. "As far as I was concerned, the Premier was turning his back on public health."

Mr Minister, why is it that the Premier and your government have turned their backs on public health?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'll refer the questions to the Minister of the Environment.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of the Environment): As the Leader of the Opposition knows full well, there is ongoing testimony being provided at the Walkerton inquiry. Obviously, at the end of that time period there will be recommendations and we look forward to dealing with any of those recommendations at that time.

Mr McGuinty: The Minister of Health could have delivered the same response. I don't understand why he referred it to you but I'll go on with this very interesting, disturbing and troublesome article.

Dr Schabas said that seven of Ontario's 37 health units are in violation of the law today because they only have a part-time medical officer, a situation he called "unprecedented." One of those is in Huron county, adjacent to Bruce county, of which Walkerton is the capital. Bruce does have a full-time officer, Dr Murray McQuigge, who issued a boil-water advisory in May 2000 at the height of the E coli crisis. But Dr Schabas then adds, "I shudder to think what would have happened if such an outbreak had happened in Huron county," where they only have a part-time medical officer of health, contrary to the law, according to Dr Schabas.

So I come back to the same question that I asked earlier and I ask it on behalf of Dr Schabas: why is it that you're turning your back on public health concerns in Ontario?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again I would hasten to remind the Leader of the Opposition that Justice O'Connor has undertaken, and is undertaking, a very comprehensive review of the situation that happened in Walkerton. I think it's very important that we not prejudge that investigation or the recommendations coming out of the inquiry.

Mr McGuinty: I'll go on with the article, Madam Minister. It says, "Schabas also criticized the Tories'

decision in mid-1996 to shut down the public laboratories that tested municipal drinking water, especially the haste with which that was done.

"He testified how he took the extraordinary step of getting [Minister] Wilson to ask his counterpart in the environment ministry about the lack of mandatory reporting of bad water."

He goes on to say, "The Tories always appeared to be driven by budgetary concerns rather than what was best for public health.... My voice was not being heard."

I think it has become painfully and perfectly clear: your government has refused to listen. This man was actually thrown out of the P and P committee room. This was a man who was charged with a very heavy responsibility to look out for the public health of all Ontarians. I ask you again, why did you turn your back on this man and his good counsel when it came to protecting the lives of Ontarians?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again I would remind the Leader of the Opposition that we not prejudge the outcome of the investigation that has been undertaken by Justice O'Connor. Like the member opposite, we look forward to the recommendations and in the meantime, as he knows full well, there will be further testimony this week.

GROUNDWATER PROTECTION

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Roughly one third of Ontarians rely on groundwater for their drinking water. Your job is to protect their drinking water. You haven't been doing your job and neither have your predecessors for some six years now. Stories about contaminated well water have become commonplace here in Ontario.

Here's the latest disturbing information. We've received a confidential memorandum and it tells us that of the 554 wells located on land the government of Ontario owns—these are lands you lease out—267 of those are contaminated and drinking water from those government-owned wells would make the farmers and their families who are leasing these lands sick. My question to you, Madam Minister, is this: if you can't provide safe drinking water for people who rent from you, how can we trust you to protect drinking water for the rest of Ontarians?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of the Environment): As the leader knows full well, this government has introduced some very stringent new drinking water regulations and certainly there is now a standard indicating that there is a need for minimum treatment, sampling and reporting, and analysis, and also that any adverse results need to be shared with the local medical officer of health, the Ministry of the Environment and the owner.

Mr McGuinty: Madam Minister, it will probably be worth our while to review the record on this score. The Provincial Auditor and the Environmental Commissioner

both warned you, or your predecessor, in 1996 and said, "We need a groundwater protection strategy for the province of Ontario." In 1998 the auditor told us you still hadn't done anything on that front. You've now been in government for six years. Ontario is still without a groundwater protection plan. One year after Walkerton, one year after seven died and 2,000 became sick, we learn that out of your own 554 wells, 267 will make people sick, if not worse. Madam Minister, have you learned nothing? Why should we trust you when it comes to the protection of our groundwater if for six long years you have yet to put in place a groundwater protection plan?

Hon Mrs Witmer: We recognize that groundwater is a very important resource for people in this province. As the member opposite knows full well, we have initiated a partnership-based program to monitor groundwater resources in Ontario. We have committed \$6 million to establish a provincial groundwater monitoring network and we will be monitoring wells. However, what the Leader of the Opposition maybe doesn't want to acknowledge is the fact that we are re-establishing a program that was phased out by the Liberals between 1985 and 1990.

1440

Mr McGuinty: You've had six long years to take responsibility and put in place a groundwater protection plan, and you have done nothing. You've been warned by the Provincial Auditor, you've been warned by the Environmental Commissioner, and you've been warned by us on this side of the House.

Today, one year after Walkerton, we learn that your government is the proud owner of 267 contaminated wells. Over 200 farmers are farming on those lands. Those farmers have families, Madam Minister, and it might just be that accidentally a child might just drink some of that water. You've had six years to put in place in Ontario a groundwater protection strategy. Why is it that over the course of those six years, not only have you done nothing about groundwater at large, but when it comes to lands owned by the government of Ontario, there are 267 wells of which you are the proud owner and which are today contaminated?

Hon Mrs Witmer: The information is not correct. Our government has committed \$6 million to establish a provincial groundwater monitoring network, and I would just like to remind the Leader of the Opposition that it was his government that phased out the program. That program was not re-established by the Liberals nor was it re-established by the NDP.

In the meantime, we are continuing to work with the conservation authorities and we are continuing to work with the municipalities in order to ensure groundwater sustainability.

WALKERTON TRAGEDY

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the acting Premier, and it concerns the

testimony of Ontario's former chief medical officer of health. Today at the Walkerton inquiry, when he was asked, he admitted that he, as the chief medical officer of health, wasn't even consulted when your government made the decision to get out of the work of testing Ontario's drinking water.

We know that you consulted the Red Tape Commission. They had a direct pipeline to the Premier's office. But the chief medical officer of health, the person who is charged with ensuring that our public health system protects people's health and safety, wasn't even consulted.

Can you tell us why, when something as important as Ontario's drinking water was at stake, you wouldn't even consult, you wouldn't even talk to the chief medical officer of health?

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): The Minister of the Environment will respond.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of the Environment): In response to the question that has just been placed by the leader of the third party, I just remind the leader that the commission, of course, is continuing to look at all of the information that is being presented to the inquiry, and it would be inappropriate for us today to prejudge the conclusion or any of those recommendations.

Mr Hampton: I'm not asking anyone to prejudge the conclusion; I'm asking a government that boasts all the time about accountability, what's your accountability for not even consulting the chief medical officer of health? What's your accountability when you get out of the work of protecting Ontario's drinking water and you don't even ask the chief medical officer of health, "Is this a good idea? Might we be putting people's health at risk?" You're not prejudging the inquiry by answering that question. You're trying to cover up your own lack of accountability and your own lack of responsibility.

So tell us, why would a government, a government anywhere, put at risk the public's drinking water supply and not even ask the medical officer of health, "Is this a good idea?"

Hon Mrs Witmer: There is a tremendous amount of information that has been provided in the course of the past few months. I think it's extremely important that we allow the inquiry to continue to do the work that it is doing, to continue with its investigation of the events. Certainly we all look forward to receiving the recommendations.

Mr Hampton: Dr Schabas said something else that's quite interesting. He confessed that right now across this province there are no fewer than seven public health districts that don't have a local medical officer of health. You know who that would be, don't you, Minister? That would be the person who would have to order that the water be boiled. It would be the local medical officer of health who would be in charge of talking to the municipality and all other local officials and saying to them, "We've got a water problem, and this is what you must do about it."

After Walkerton has happened, after seven people were killed and over 2,000 were rendered seriously ill by this kind of water problem, can you explain to the people of Ontario why there are still seven health districts that don't have a medical officer of health who could blow the whistle on dirty water there, as it was blown at Walkerton, but unfortunately too late? Tell us why the seven districts still do not have a medical officer of health, despite the fact that the law says they must have a medical officer of health.

Hon Mrs Witmer: The testimony today is part of the comprehensive review that has been undertaken. Again, I would hasten to add that it is very important that we not prejudge the investigation that is taking place or the work or the questions that are being asked by the inquiry. Certainly, we all look forward to receiving the recommendations in order to ensure we would never again have a situation such as Walkerton.

NORTHERN CANCER TREATMENT

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Health. Two weeks ago Ontario's Ombudsman, Clare Lewis, found that your ministry was discriminating against cancer patients from northern Ontario. He very specifically made the recommendation that equal funding be provided to breast and prostate cancer patients who have to travel for radiation treatment. He said that what was happening under your government was "improperly discriminatory."

Today, a woman from my constituency, Anna Watson, came here to Queen's Park for the second time in a year to plead for equal treatment for cancer patients no matter what part of Ontario they come from. She knows about this at first hand. She had to spend \$2,500 out of her own pocket just to get to the cancer treatment.

The question is simple: will you now guarantee the people of this province that you will accept the recommendation of the Ombudsman of Ontario and provide equal treatment for those cancer patients who have to travel in order to access cancer treatment?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): We are in receipt of the Ombudsman's report, as is the honourable member. The Ombudsman's report makes certain conclusions and certainly has a series of recommendations. We are apprised of that and we are taking it under advisement. I can tell the honourable member that we want to create a travel grant policy for all of Ontario that is fair to northern Ontario and southern Ontario and fair for cancer sufferers and for other sufferers of terrible diseases. We are apprised of this, and we are working our way through the best way to respond to this and other requests.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Supplementary?

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Minister, the Ombudsman found that your government discriminated against northern cancer patients, and you have an obligation to provide a remedy. I asked the Ombudsman in the Legislative Assembly committee last Thursday why he

didn't recommend retroactive payments for northern cancer patients. He said the following:

"I was very, very concerned about the time it was taking for me to get a response by the ministry on this case.... I thought it would give the ministry a reason to take longer to answer me and I thought if I waited, it would be too late and I wouldn't be here, because I have not felt that this matter has moved expeditiously.... I felt that it wouldn't take too much to snooker my getting to this stage and I didn't want to be snookered."

The Ombudsman makes it clear that your government has done everything possible to continue its discrimination against northern cancer patients. Minister, the time for review, the time for delay, the time for stalling is over. Enough is enough. Will you today agree that your government will retroactively reimburse northern cancer patients for 100% of their costs for food, travel and accommodations too?

1450

Hon Mr Clement: In fact, we are reviewing every aspect of the Ombudsman's report. I think the honourable member would be the first one standing up and criticizing us if we acted in so much haste that we tried to preclude the Ombudsman's report.

We are in receipt of it now and it does have a number of serious recommendations. We on this side of the House are interested in fairness, we're interested in a policy that works for all areas of Ontario, all citizens of Ontario, and indeed deals not only with cancer sufferers but also sufferers of other diseases. That's the spirit in which we are tackling this thorny problem, which quite frankly precedes this government.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): This question is for the Minister of Health. Now that you have learned today that seven of Ontario's 37 health units are in violation of the law because they only have a part-time medical officer, something that Dr Schabas has called "unprecedented," what I'm wondering is whether or not your government will once again ignore his warnings. He has told us in the past, "As far as I was concerned, the Premier was turning his back on public health." He said earlier today, "This was a government that really held public institutions in contempt. It was contemptuous of the people who worked in public institutions."

Minister, we now understand that seven of Ontario's 37 health units are in violation of the law. You have that information. Will you ignore Dr Schabas's warning or will you act on it and fix that today?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Let me assure this House and the honourable member that we take public health extremely seriously on this side of the House. We have certainly increased our flow of dollars for preventive medicine that has been roundly endorsed by public health officials. Our flu immunization policy, which is unprecedented in

North America, is a shining example of preventive medicine. We in fact have a very forward-thinking Alzheimer's strategy which again has elements of preventive medicine, and our Family Health Network has large elements of preventive medicine.

The honourable member seems to have drawn some conclusions which are not borne out by the facts. We on this side of the House take public health extremely seriously and have been working with public health authorities and public policy designed to have better public health in Ontario.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, you may say that you take public health concerns seriously, but your actions speak otherwise. If it comes to a choice as to whether I should believe Dr Schabas, the former chief medical officer of health for Ontario, the man who issued warnings time and time again to you, or whether I should believe you or other representatives of your government, I'm with Dr Schabas. Here are some of the things he said: "As far as I was concerned, the Premier was turning his back on public health." "The Tories always appeared to be driven by budgetary concerns rather than what was best for public health." "My voice was not being heard." It seems to me that once again you are giving evidence of that.

He has told us today that you are in violation of the law. There are seven communities where we don't have a full-time medical officer of health. He has issued another warning. He has sounded the alarm bells again today. Minister, why is it that you continue to ignore Dr Schabas's warnings?

Hon Mr Clement: The honourable member is just plain wrong. In fact, of course we as a ministry would be happy to work with any medical officers of health or any jurisdictions that need some assistance in this area.

I can tell the honourable member that all local health boards have at least acting medical officers of health and therefore are consistent with the Health Protection and Promotion Act. So when the honourable member makes this accusation on his side that there is somehow a law being broken, he should be very clear about what he is suggesting, because it just isn't true.

We on this side of the House have put our money where our mouth is. We are supportive of public health. We have been supportive of new programs in public health. Our record speaks volumes compared to his rhetoric.

ACADEMIC TESTING

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): My question is for the Minister of Education. On Friday you announced new testing for Ontario students. There are many studies that identify the positive correlation between student testing and better student results. In fact, one study I found recently discovered that students from provinces with testing programs were better prepared in math and science than students from provinces that lacked such tests.

Minister, can you tell me what commitment the government is making to increase student success at this time?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education, Government House Leader): As this government clearly believes and we've said many times, if we don't test, we don't know if our students are learning the new curriculum. The tests I announced on Friday are specifically designed to help teachers determine how well students are learning the curriculum and determine how best to give students assistance to improve.

The test questions will be for key subjects, core subjects from grades 3 to 11—science, for example, and social studies—and will be phased in over the next several years. The questions are going to be developed by the EQAO. They obviously have the testing expertise as the government's arm's-length testing agency. These tests, while developed by them, will be administered and marked by classroom teachers as part of the regular assessment they are doing of students.

Mrs Molinari: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. It is evident that there is a genuine commitment to improve student results and success.

As you know, I agree that testing plays an important role in a student's education. In fact, I recall that the opposition once felt the same way, but it now seems they are changing their minds. Of course, as we have seen quite often, the opposition changing their minds has become a common scene here.

Minister, will you confirm that our government will remain committed to improving students' education through effective testing measurements?

Hon Mrs Ecker: Yet again we've seen a flip-flop from the Liberals on this issue. On a very, very important quality standard in education, while we have the education critic out there saying that testing is not appropriate for students, that he objects to students, that he says it's loony—he called it "loony," and yet at the same time his leader has been out there telling the voters that he agrees with the standardized curriculum and with standardized testing.

So here we go again. Dalton says one thing; Gerard says another. Would the real Liberal Party please stand up?

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I have a question for the Minister of Health. Minister, on my return from Thunder Bay to Toronto this morning I was seated beside a constituent of mine, a young mother with her four-month-old baby. They were making a return visit to University Hospital in London for further treatment for the infant, who is likely to have to undergo heart surgery.

At least this time the mom was able to travel with her baby. When this baby was born, she had to be airlifted to London for emergency life-saving surgery. There was no room on the air ambulance for the parents of the child, so

they had to follow on a commercial flight. This young mom has been denied a northern health travel grant to help cover her plane costs on the grounds that she had not actually accompanied her infant.

Minister, this is how inhumane your travel grant program has become. We have written to you about this case, as we've written to you about so many others. Why will you not see the anguish that people are going through and act now to provide fairness for people who have no choice but to travel to get necessary health care?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As the honourable member is aware, the northern health travel grant preceded this government. I agree with the honourable member that it is a program that needs to be fixed.

I will not comment on the individual case, but if you can provide me some details later, we can certainly look into it. But from my perspective, we do have a travel grant program which at times seems inconsistent and deserves to be reformed. That is exactly what this government has been seeking to do. We have been getting lots of feedback from experts, lots of feedback from citizens in the north, and we're putting it all into the hopper to get a fair program for northerners and a fair program for all Ontarians, regardless of where they live and regardless of which disease they are afflicted with.

Mrs McLeod: I don't think that answer is going to convince that young mom I was travelling with this morning, Minister. Northern Ontario residents have tried so long and so hard to get your attention. You have had case after case brought directly to your attention. There have been hundreds of petitions with thousands of names on them, asking simply for fairness. The only response northerners have had is your Premier saying that the real discrimination is against southern Ontario residents.

Anna Watson was not prepared to accept that, not after she paid \$2,500 out of her own pocket to get her cancer care. That's why she went to the Ombudsman. Northern Ontario residents are angry, they are frustrated and they have waited long enough. Anna Watson was here today with Gerry Loughheed from OSECC, Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care. They are prepared to take your government to court if you will not act now to end this discrimination.

Minister, I ask you, will you act to right the wrong, or do northern Ontario residents have to take your government to court just to get fair treatment?

1500

Hon Mr Clement: Again, if the person to whom the honourable member referred would like to contact our ministry to work out the issue, I'd be happy to facilitate that.

Mrs McLeod: We have.

Hon Mr Clement: I can tell the honourable member—

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): We phoned the day after you became minister.

Hon Mr Clement: —and she knows this full well, and Mr Bartolucci knows full well as well, that there

have been instances where they have communicated to me by correspondence on particular issues about how the northern health travel grant has been applied. I have been facilitating fairness and justice for the issues that deserve fairness and justice. For these honourable members to stand there and say that we have been inflexible when I have been helping their constituents day in and day out on behalf of the people of Ontario is beyond the pale and is not right.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): My question is for the Chair of Management Board of Cabinet. I have constituents in my riding who are concerned about the pace at which information technology is growing in the province. They do not object to the use of information technology but want to ensure that Ontario does not get left behind. They want to ensure the talented men and women in Ontario will be contenders in this phenomenal growth, creating more jobs and putting more money into the economy.

Minister, does the government have a plan to ensure that this hope becomes a reality? Is it committed to helping this very valuable sector of the economy grow and compete not only in Canada but around the world? What can you tell my constituents who work for small and medium-sized IT companies who want to make sure they are able to take part in what this technological revolution promises?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I'm pleased to say this government believes that development of all sectors of the economy is a priority. We know that good jobs are an essential part of building a very strong Ontario. That's been evidenced since 1995 by the unprecedented growth of almost 850,000 net new jobs in Ontario. This not only applies to large companies but also to small and medium companies. That's why we're taking a comprehensive approach, including an advisory council on e-government which will include people from the IT sector, which will help us in terms of looking at issues concerning the private sector, such as a priorities implementation of e-government, technology and business alignment, managing processes of large-scale change, linkages between government delivery partners and relationships between government and industry.

Mr Stewart: The government of Ontario itself has a significant role to play in the way it chooses its suppliers for contracts which are worth several million dollars. Some of its contracts can be very lucrative to awardees. Some business people believe the standards the government applies too heavily favour big businesses and do not allow smaller competitors a realistic chance. How do you respond to this, and how does the government address this in light of its other responsibilities to the people of Ontario and its government employees?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: I've said it before publicly: this government's committed to becoming a world leader in

e-government by the year 2003. This includes, of course, fostering a very positive business atmosphere and environment. As my colleagues and I have said, this government's first priority is the people of Ontario, which means we're committed to the prudent management of tax dollars entrusted to us by the taxpayers. We're going to evaluate all contracts with that view of getting the best value.

We'd also like to balance that with encouraging growth in the smaller and medium-sized companies. Part of this is dealing with the advisory council getting some feedback from the industry itself. However, in the meantime we're taking measures to ensure that we encourage fair competition among companies when competing for government contracts. This includes participating in forums to allow small and medium business to understand how to deal with government and its contracts and the procurement process.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to give second and third readings to Bill 66, the Wilfrid Laurier University bill.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): It is a little out of the ordinary to ask the same question, but I understand there may be some movement there, so I will ask for unanimous consent. I'm afraid I heard some noes. Start the clock. Leader of the third party.

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources, who seems not to be here right now. I'm told he's in the building.

The question concerns another of the Premier's golfing buddies asking for special treatment. We understand that Peter Grant wants to carve out pristine crown land to build a golf course for himself, for his personal pleasure. He wants to extract huge quantities of water from Twin Lakes. He wants to spray pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers without regard to environmental values or the concerns of local residents. What's important about this is that Peter Grant happens to have contributed \$80,000 to the Conservative Party, including \$5,000 to your election campaign, Minister of Natural Resources. Is this what Ontario has become, that someone who wants a golf course contributes some money to the Conservative Party and then the golf course flows?

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Natural Resources): I must say I'm disappointed with the question. It's obvious that the leader of the third party is using the Toronto Star for his research material, and he's going to be disappointed to know there are some inaccuracies in the question he's asked today. I don't know, and I suspect the member opposite doesn't know, what is in the mind of Mr Grant. He has made an application to the ministry. It is going through the normal process that any other application made to the ministry would, and the process is being followed to the T. That's the process that's in

place, that's what's happening, and any allegations to the opposite, I haven't seen any evidence of whatsoever.

Mr Hampton: Let me explain for the Minister of Natural Resources. What's on people's minds is this: someone named Peter Minogue, another Peter, wanted a golf course on the shores of Callander Bay. The Ministry of Natural Resources biologists and fisheries experts over a long-standing period said, "No, this is not in good standing in terms of environmental values." But Mr Minogue went the political route and the financial route and, lo and behold, a golf course appears despite the objections of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

What I'm asking you in this case, Minister, is to respect environmental values, put clean water and good forests ahead of Peter Grant's financial contributions to the Conservative Party. That's the process we'd like to see followed. Can you give us any guarantee you're going to follow the process of protecting environmental values rather than the process of your financial contributors?

Hon Mr Snobelen: I don't believe this government needs much of a lecture on environmental values when we've created 378 new parks and protected areas in this province, protecting an additional six million acres for future generations. I don't think we need a lecture from the member opposite, but I can tell the member that one other component of this decision-making process that is important to the people of Ontario is local decision-making. That's why this is in the hands of the district manager in that area, which it should be; that's why there have been letters issued to local residents; that's why there have been public meetings; and that's why there's been a public and agency notification period extended beyond that required by law for an additional 30 days. That's why all of those have taken place.

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES IN EASTERN ONTARIO

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): My question is to the Minister of Health. I'd like to ask you about the waiting times for MRIs and CAT scans in the Ottawa area that serve Ottawa and eastern Ontario. Your government had considered carefully to review the situation in Ottawa, which is quite desperate. There were reassurances that we would see improvements. We have still not seen anything. Let me reassure you that a CAT scan or MRI is no small thing for someone who may have their life hanging in the balance.

1510

In Ottawa as it stands today the waiting lists are far beyond any of the recommendations from your ministry or from Cancer Care Ontario. It has gotten to the point where we're seeing our doctors leave. Dr Jacques Bouchard, a brilliant surgeon at the Ottawa Hospital, is now departing for Alberta because he is so frustrated with the diagnostic system and the backlog that is there that he can't stand to work in this particular system.

Minister, I ask you, what do you plan on doing in terms of relieving the long waiting lists in the Ottawa area and eastern Ontario?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I thank the honourable member for the question. Indeed, there are presently three MRIs currently located in the city of Ottawa. I can tell you that that gives it a ratio that is better than, let's say, western Quebec and other areas of the province of Ontario as well. I can tell the honourable member that, as he knows, there have been various reports about the state of MRI services in Ottawa. We are in possession of those, and we are making some decisions this year relating to the fact that we are spending \$23.5 billion of the taxpayers' money on the provision of public health services in Ontario this year, a record amount for the sixth year in a row. Certainly, I'll take the honourable member's point of view under advisement.

Mr Patten: I gather that there isn't anything imminent. Precious time is needed to fight a life-threatening illness, as you well know. Following my last cancer chemotherapy on May 9, I was then slated to have a CAT scan, the results of which would take over nine weeks to see whether or not I would need to have continued treatment. If I don't, then everything is fine. If I do, time being the enemy, I might be in jeopardy.

I'm not alone. There are many people of eastern Ontario—I have three options: (1) I can wait, which I'm doing; (2) I could try to use favours and influence someone here or there. I rejected that option; (3) I could go to Hull and in one afternoon walk away for \$350 to \$400. You talked about Quebec. They provide those kinds of services. I ask you to check your statistics, by the way, because I don't think your ratios are correct.

So I ask you, what do you suggest to those of us who may be in a situation where we may be jeopardized in one way or another? What would you suggest we do? Which option should we exercise?

Hon Mr Clement: I thank the honourable member for the question. Let me just say I know we're dealing with a very human issue here, and I'm not belittling that.

I can tell you just for the record that the Ottawa region is served by one MRI machine for every 368,000 population, which compares favourably to many other regions. Having said all that, obviously what the honourable member is facing—and obviously all of us wish the best for the honourable member—is what is in fact being faced by many other Ontarians, and it just isn't good enough. I agree with the honourable member.

That is why from our point of view we have suggested to the federal government that they should live up to their commitments when it comes to health care spending. But in the meantime we have to seriously look at the best ways to provide the best service to Ontarians, not only now but also for future generations. That is the big question that is before us. I think it behooves us as politicians to look very seriously at other alternatives. We cannot bury our heads in the sand. We cannot just pretend that the status quo is going to work in the future. Certainly the

honourable member's perspective is a valid perspective and one which we should take under consideration.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): If we could stop the clock for just a quick moment, we have in the members' gallery west a former member, Dr Bob Frankford, the member for Scarborough East in the 35th Parliament. Dr Frankford.

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): My question is for the Attorney General. Minister, the citizens of Ontario are tired of young offenders being given a free ride when it comes to sentencing, courtesy of the federal government.

The Young Offenders Act, which has been in effect—or should I say of no effect—since 1984, is a toothless embarrassment. To quote Peel Regional Police Superintendent Ed Towe, “You can go to young offender court right now and hear total disregard for the justice system.”

On May 29 the federal government passed its much anticipated—eight-year wait—Youth Criminal Justice Act, which was supposed to toughen the Young Offenders Act. Unfortunately, this bill is as bad as the old one and in some cases worse. The new bill does not address many of the recommendations brought forward by the Mike Harris government and other province governments.

Minister, would you explain Ontario's position on the federal government's Youth Criminal Justice Act?

Hon David Young (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): I appreciate the question. In essence, what has happened over the past few years is that we have seen a federal government, the Liberal Party in Ottawa, essentially ignore not only the representatives in this Legislature who have asked for an opportunity to make submissions to the federal government about this very important issue but ignore the people of this country.

In fact, in a recent CTV-Angus Reid poll the vast majority of those surveyed indicated that they had little or no confidence whatsoever in the Young Offenders Act.

The member is quite right. The Youth Criminal Justice Act that has been introduced and is currently in front of the Senate does little or nothing to improve the situation, and the people of Canada deserve better. That's why we have asked the federal government to give us an opportunity to present to the standing committee and we have asked for an opportunity to present to the Senate committee, because we have a voice. It's the voice of the people of this country and it deserves to be heard.

Mrs Munro: The McGuinty Liberals have repeatedly said that our government is all sound bite and no solution when it comes to the Young Offenders Act. Minister, can you please let us know what you have done to try and

pressure the federal government to substantially amend this legislation and take some real steps to strengthen youth justice in Canada?

Hon Mr Young: We have come forward over the past number of weeks with 100 proposed amendments that we have developed after consulting with front-line police officers and after consulting with victims. They are amendments that will do a great deal, if adopted, to improve the manner in which legislation that exists in this country deals with young offenders.

It is legislation that if adopted by the federal Parliament—this is what the Mike Harris government says the federal Liberals should do. We say that if you commit an adult crime, you deserve adult time. We say that if you use a weapon in the course of an offence, then you should have some jail term. We say that when you're dealing with a serious crime and a 16- or 17-year-old who is convicted of that offence, there should be public identification so that the communities and the people of this province and of this country understand just what is going on in the courts and in the communities of this country.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, the increased demand for post-secondary spaces in 2003 and beyond lies mainly in the GTA. The increase in the population of 18- to 24-year-olds is approximately 25% higher in the 905 belt than in the rest of the province—in fact, than in the rest of the country.

Most University of Toronto students who live in the 905 area attend the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses. Minister, your SuperBuild to date has not addressed these specific needs. Can you assure this House that any student who needs to stay in the GTA will not be forced to move because of your government's lack of planning and underfunding?

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, minister responsible for women's issues): As the member opposite knows, the universities and colleges made their submissions to the SuperBuild fund two years ago. All of these announcements, some 59 announcements have been made.

Our analysis is that with the colleges and universities together, the opportunities for spaces have been fairly well distributed. If there is some outstanding information that we don't have that the member thinks will affect the accessibility, I would be happy to discuss it with her.

Right now, there are so many opportunities, \$1.9 billion, \$1.8 billion new buildings, 73,000 spaces yet to be built and offered. I think there is a fair choice across the province, but I'm happy to discuss any inconsistencies that the member may bring to my attention.

1520

Mrs Bountrogianni: It's not very reassuring that this was missed. Some 20,000 out of the 80,000 students in

the double cohort and beyond in this decade are from the 905 belt, Mississauga and Scarborough. York University and the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses of the University of Toronto must account for the demand for these spaces. That's a fact. Some 87% of the students at the two University of Toronto campuses live in the GTA and remain at home for their education. These institutions have already had to accept thousands of students without government support.

Without additional capital investments, students in the 905 area will have to seek a place elsewhere. SuperBuild did not address these specific needs. They will not be able to live at home. Between 50% and 60% of them require OSAP to go to school. Will you commit today in the House that you will invest the needed capital costs so that these students who need to stay at home in the 905 belt are able to stay at home?

Hon Mrs Cunningham: In the GTA region there are over 4,480 spaces at Centennial College; there are over 3,000 spaces at Durham College; there are 1,800 spaces at George Brown college; there are 400 spaces at Ryerson; there are 2,400 spaces at Ryerson for the centre for engineering; 2,050 at Seneca College, and the list goes on: Sheridan-University of Toronto, University of Toronto, York University, Humber and Guelph, Ryerson and George Brown, Toronto and Sheridan, York and Seneca. These colleges often work together in the GTA. They have partnerships for joint programs. The colleges and universities were separate. They did their own analysis of what spaces they need for the students and we responded: \$1.8 billion; 73,000 new spaces across the province. I would be happy to discuss any specific deficiency that the member feels would be important to address.

CEMETERY MAINTENANCE

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): My question is for the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. Last week the member for Elgin-Middlesex-London gave a statement in this House regarding rural cemeteries in Ontario and the challenges they are facing when it comes to proper care and maintenance. Minister, could you clarify for the House what really happens when a cemetery owner can no longer maintain a cemetery?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Over the last 20 years, when I've had the privilege of being a member of this Legislature and representing rural constituencies, I've met with many individuals who have voluntarily taken time to take care of our rural cemeteries. This is often done on a volunteer basis and small boards, small cemeteries, operate in a non-profit mode. The owner is responsible for the upkeep, and hopefully they can gain enough from the sale of the plots and from ongoing fees in order to sustain their operation. This is the way it has been for over 70 years. If an owner fails to keep up a cemetery, the municipality is then forced to take over.

Mr Gill: In his rant last week, the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London stated that in response to the concerns raised by the Fingal Cemetery owner, you referred them to the Alcohol and Gaming Commission to, as he said, “stage bingos and sell beer to bury our loved ones.” Minister, could you please tell us what you suggested to the owner of the Fingal Cemetery?

Hon Mr Sterling: That’s why I appreciate the opportunity to clarify this particular situation. I would never have been as insensitive as to suggest this to these people who are doing good work in our rural communities. I did mention to the owner that there are several opportunities where other cemetery owners in rural areas have gone for financial help.

First of all, because the responsibility would devolve to the municipalities, some municipalities assist rural cemeteries. As well, I noted that at this particular cemetery that was referred to in the correspondence there had not been any increases in plot prices or in charges since 1994, and I suggested they look at that policy again.

HAZARDOUS WASTE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. I see the briefing notes are still here but the chair is vacant.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Stop the clock for a quick moment, please. Is the minister still here? The leader of the third party.

Mr Hampton: Minister, my federal NDP colleague from Windsor-St Clair, Joe Comartin, has obtained through freedom of information an Environment Canada draft report that shows that Ontario has become a hotbed of hazardous waste dumping while you and the Liberals in Ottawa ignore the problem. Safety-Kleen, and I’m sure you’re aware of Safety-Kleen near Sarnia, takes in practically all of the imported hazardous waste in Canada destined for landfills. The company is responsible for toxic leaks at the St Clair township site that people fear will contaminate their water. My question, Minister, is, in a post-Walkerton Ontario, how can you refuse to act on this serious problem?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of the Environment): In response to that question, I’d like to inform the member that we have taken action. We actually did amend and strengthen Ontario’s hazardous waste framework on March 31, 2001, in order to ensure that we have the toughest framework in the history of this province. We have stringent new leachate testing requirements that are more comprehensive than that of the United States. We have expanded the list of known toxic chemicals from 31 to 88, well ahead of the 40 identified in the United States. We have brought derived-from-standard in line with the US EPA.

I’d also like the leader of the third party to know that we are finding that the amount of imported hazardous waste has decreased from 1999 to 2000.

Mr Hampton: Minister, I notice that you don’t mention changes in law. What you’ve mentioned is simply a

framework, and because the law remains the same, you’ve essentially got a situation where Ontario is the worst jurisdiction in North America. Let me tell you what’s not in your laws. These companies can dump what they want. They don’t have to report annually to protection authorities. They don’t have to provide for groundwater quality monitoring. They don’t have to treat their hazardous waste before dumping. They don’t even have to have a plan in place in case of emergency.

What has happened is this: every other jurisdiction in North America has been updating their environmental protection laws to deal with the dumping of hazardous waste, except for your government, which has held out an open hand that says, “Hazardous waste dumpers, you’re welcome in Ontario.” I ask you the question again: in post-Walkerton Ontario, are you finally going to clean up your act?

Hon Mrs Witmer: The leader of the third party is wrong. He is categorically wrong. We are reviewing our hazardous waste policy. We will continue to take steps to strengthen it. As I’ve just indicated to the member opposite, we have seen a decrease in the amount of hazardous waste coming into this province and we are seeing an increase of what is being expanded. So I would hasten to encourage you to make sure that next time you get your facts straight.

The Speaker: New question.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, I’m going to ask you to meet your ministerial responsibility and actually stop accepting toxic hazardous waste into the province, most of which you know is landfilled and incinerated in St Clair township at Safety-Kleen. Your ministry made it easy for Safety-Kleen to expand in 1997. The site has leaks, our groundwater is at risk and your rules are still so lax that, unlike in the United States, at Safety-Kleen hazardous waste is simply dumped into the ground. Incredibly, 70% of that waste comes from outside the province.

Under Minister Sterling, Minister Clement and now yourself, the provincial environment checks and balances have been weakened. Irreparable damage is being done to the environment of that part of southwestern Ontario, and I don’t know how we’ll ever clean it up.

Minister, will you stop accepting toxic hazardous waste from outside the province since you don’t have the regulations to deal with these wastes in an environmentally sound manner?

1530

Hon Mrs Witmer: The member opposite knows full well that the health and safety of the residents in her community are priorities for this government. In fact, we want to assure all the people who live near the landfill site that we are taking the steps that are necessary to safeguard their health and their environment.

She knows full well we have ensured that Safety-Kleen hire an on-site inspector and that they are providing an enhanced level of monitoring at the site. I want to assure her that we will continue to monitor the activities at Safety-Kleen and also any further expansion.

Ms Di Cocco: Minister, you didn't answer my question. You don't have the checks and balances in place. You have allowed and have undermined the regulations your government has, until we have become the largest toxic dump in Canada, most of which is being imported. We are importing more than they import into Mexico.

You have the jurisdiction to ban and restrict the accepting of hazardous waste. You are not managing the waste in an environmentally sound manner. In 1996, 1997 and 1998, your ministry and the Red Tape Commission weakened the rules for hazardous waste disposal and recycling. This ban and restriction is needed because it's necessary to protect human, animal and plant life and health. Will you meet your ministerial obligation and ban the accepting of hazardous waste since you do not have your act together on this matter?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would say to the member opposite that she is being very selective in the choice of years. Perhaps she should have gone to 1999 and 2000. How deceitful to simply not pull all of the information—

The Speaker: Order. I'm afraid you have to withdraw that remark.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I withdraw that, Mr Speaker.

But how selective. If she takes a look at what was imported in 1999, it was 321,000 tonnes. In 2000, it was only 210,000 tonnes. Meanwhile, the exports have gone from 175,000 tonnes in 1999 to 220,000 tonnes in 2000.

Furthermore, she is conveniently neglecting to mention that Environment Canada—the federal government—is responsible for regulating the import and export of hazardous waste into and out of Canada. She also continues to omit the fact that we have strengthened our hazardous waste framework in 2001. Conveniently, she only chooses to talk about the years to 1998. She needs to share all the facts with her constituents and the people in this province.

PETITIONS

HOME CARE

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a petition that reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the need for home care services is rapidly growing in Ontario due to the aging of the population and hospital restructuring; and

“Whereas the prices paid by community care access centres, commonly known as CCACs, to purchase home care services for their clients are rising due to factors beyond the control of the CCACs; and

“Whereas the funding provided by the Ontario government through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is inadequate to meet the growing need for home care services; and

“Whereas the funding shortfall, coupled with the implications of Bill 46, the Public Sector Accountability

Act, currently before the Legislature, are forcing CCACs such as Niagara to make deep cuts in home care services without any policy direction from the provincial government;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to take control of policy-setting for home care services through rational, population-based health care planning rather than simply by underfunding the system; and

“(2) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to provide sufficient funding to CCACs to support the home care services that are the mandate of CCACs in the volumes needed to meet their communities' rapidly growing needs; and

“(3) That the Legislative Assembly make it necessary for the provincial government to notify the agencies it funds of the amount of funding they will be given by the government in a fiscal year at least three months before the commencement of this fiscal year.”

I affix my signature. I am in complete agreement.

ELECTRICITY DEREGULATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislature.

“Whereas the Harris government's plan to privatize and deregulate Ontario's electricity system will lead to higher rates because private owners will sell more power to US customers whose rates are typically 50% higher than Ontario's; and

“Whereas selling coal plants like Nanticoke to the private sector will lead to more pollution because the private owners will run the plants at full capacity to earn a profit; and

“Whereas electricity deregulation in California has led to sky-high rates and blackouts; and

“Whereas Ontario needs a system of public power that will ensure rate stability, environmental protection and secure access to power;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the undersigned call on the government to scrap electricity deregulation and privatization and bring in a system of accountable public power. The first priority for such a public power system must be incentives for energy conservation and green power. Electricity rates and major energy projects must be subject to full public hearings and binding rulings by a public regulator instead of leaving energy rates to private profit.”

This has been signed by dozens of citizens and individuals across Ontario and I have affixed my signature to it as well.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I am pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas wide parental and student choice are essential to the best possible education for all students; and

“Whereas many people believe that an education with a strong faith component, be it Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu or another religion, is best for their children; and

“Whereas many people believe that special education methodologies such as those practised in the Montessori and Waldorf schools are best for their children; and

“Whereas over 100,000 students are currently enrolled in the independent schools of Ontario; and

“Whereas the parents of these students continue to support the public education system through their tax dollars; and

“Whereas an effective way to enhance the education of those students is to allow an education tax credit for a portion of the tuition fees paid for that education;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To pass the budget bill giving tax credits to parents of children who attend independent schools as soon as possible.”

I affix my signature.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): On the one-year anniversary of Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care, I am proud to read the following petition into the record:

“Whereas the northern health travel grant offers a reimbursement of partial travel costs at a rate of 30.4 cents per kilometre one way for northerners forced to travel for cancer care while travel policy for southerners who travel for cancer care features full reimbursement costs for travel, meals and accommodation;

“Whereas a cancer tumour knows no health travel policy or geographic location;

“Whereas a recently released Oracle research poll confirms that 92% of Ontarians support equal health travel funding;

“Whereas northern Ontario residents pay the same amount of taxes and are entitled to the same access to health care and all government services and inherent civil rights as residents living elsewhere in the province;

“Whereas we support the efforts of OSECC (Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care), founded by Gerry Loughheed Jr, former chair of Cancer Care Ontario, Northeast Region, to correct this injustice against northerners travelling for cancer treatment;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature to demand the Mike Harris government move immediately to fund full travel expenses for northern Ontario cancer patients and eliminate the health care apartheid which exists presently in the province of Ontario.”

I proudly give these to Anthony Gras, our page from Sudbury, Ontario, to deliver to the desk, and I of course affix my signature as I'm in complete agreement.

1540

HOME CARE

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario community care access centres deliver vital home care services to seniors, the disabled and those discharged from hospital so they can remain in their own homes; and

“Whereas the Ontario community care access centres need an additional \$175 million from the Ministry of Health this fiscal year just to deliver their current level of health care services; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Health has refused to fund this necessary increase and has further failed to provide the CCACs with equity funding last year and this year, despite a 1998 promise by the former Minister of Long-Term Care, Cam Jackson, to do so; and

“Whereas this deliberate underfunding by the government of CCACs has forced the CCAC boards to adopt a deficit-reduction plan which severely reduces the home care services they provide; and

“Whereas this reduction has a drastic impact on clients who cannot afford to pay for these services and will be forced to go without necessary home care;

“Therefore, be it resolved that the Conservative government immediately fund the additional \$175 million requested by the Ontario CCACs this year and, further, provide the equity funding that was promised in 1998.”

This is signed by people in support of the East York, Toronto and Scarborough CCACs, and I have affixed my signature in support as well.

ELECTRICITY GENERATING STATION

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): This is a petition on behalf of the residents of Mississauga South and Oakville. It was tabled with the Speaker, who is unable to present petitions, and I'm happy to present it on his behalf and also on my own as the member for Mississauga South.

“Whereas Sithe Energies Canadian Development Ltd is actively pursuing the development of an 800-megawatt electricity generating facility;

“Whereas the 14-hectare parcel of land on which the station is proposed is located on the east side of Winston Churchill Boulevard in the Southdown industrial district of Mississauga;

“Whereas Sithe has stated its commitment to an open dialogue with communities where it has a presence and to being responsive to the concerns of the same; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has a responsibility to ensure the safety of Ontario citizens and to determine how this facility will impact those who live in its immediate surrounding area,

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario direct the Ministry of the Environment to undertake a formal environmental assessment of the Sithe project.”

I'm happy to have signed this petition and support it wholeheartedly.

SAFE STREETS LEGISLATION

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I have a petition from the good people of Chesterville and Winchester, Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the squeegee kid law was set up to stop squeegee kids from hassling motorists, we believe that the law has gone too far; it has now stopped the Lions Club of Chesterville ... from raising money for the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

“The law has to be changed to exclude all non-profit organizations, otherwise the various fire department fundraisers, fundraising parades etc will have to cease and desist immediately;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To rewrite the squeegee kid law, to exclude all non-profit organizations.”

I have about 500 signatures from the good people of Winchester and Chesterville, and I affix my signature to this as well.

HOME CARE

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the need for home care services is rapidly growing in Ontario due to the aging of the population and hospital restructuring; and

“Whereas the prices paid by community care access centres to purchase home care services for their clients are rising due to factors beyond the control of community care access centres; and

“Whereas the funding provided by the Ontario government through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is inadequate to meet the growing need for home care services; and

“Whereas the funding shortfall, coupled with the implications of Bill 46, the Public Sector Accountability Act, currently before the Legislature are forcing CCACs to make deep cuts in home care services without any policy direction from the provincial government;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to take control of policy-setting for home care services through rational, population-based health care planning rather than simply by underfunding the system; and

“(2) That the Legislative Assembly direct the provincial government to provide sufficient funding to

CCACs to support the home care services that are the mandate of CCACs in the volumes needed to meet their communities' rapidly growing needs; and

“(3) That the Legislative Assembly make it necessary for the provincial government to notify the agencies it funds of the amount of funding they will be given by the government in a fiscal year at least three months before the commencement of that fiscal year.”

This is signed by 1,738 constituents in the riding of Nickel Belt. I agree with the petitioners and I have signed it as well.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas children are being exposed to sexually explicit materials in many commercial establishments;

“Whereas many municipalities do not have bylaws in place to protect minors, and those that do vary from place to place and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposure to sexually explicit materials;

“Whereas uniform standards are needed in Ontario that would make it illegal to sell, rent, loan or display sexually explicit materials to minors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To pass Bill 95, Protection of Minors from Sexually Explicit Goods and Services Act, 2000, as soon as possible.”

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

WATER EXTRACTION

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I have a petition here which is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas we, the residents and cottagers of Bob's Lake, strenuously object to the permit issued by the Ministry of the Environment to OMYA Inc to remove 1.5 million litres of water per day from the Tay River, without adequate assessment of the consequences and without adequate consultation with the public and those people and groups who have expertise and interest in the area; and

“Whereas it is our belief that this water taking will drastically impact the environment and seriously affect the water levels in Bob's and Christie lakes. This in turn would affect fish spawning beds as well as habitat. It would also affect the wildlife in and around the lakes;

“Whereas Bob's Lake and the Tay River watershed are already highly stressed by the historic responsibility of Parks Canada to use Bob's Lake as a reservoir for the Rideau Canal; and

“Whereas the movement of water from the lake through the watershed for navigation purposes in the canal provides sufficient stress and problems for the lake.

This water taking permit will only compound the stresses on the waterway;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We request that this permit be rescinded until a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of water taking by OMYA Inc on the environment, the water levels and the water needs of these communities is complete. An independent non-partisan body should undertake this evaluation.”

I agree with the petition and I’ve signed it.

PERSONAL NEEDS ALLOWANCE

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I have further petitions from the Hamilton second level lodging home tenants committee. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas individuals who are tenants (residents) in facilities such as care homes, nursing homes or domiciliary hostels under certain acts are provided with a personal needs allowance to meet incidental costs other than those provided by the facility; and

“Whereas the personal needs allowance has been fixed by the Ontario government at a rate of \$112 a month for nearly a decade and has not kept pace with cost-of-living increases, and furthermore is inadequate to meet incidental costs such as clothing, hygiene products and other essentials;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately review and amend provincial legislation to increase the personal needs allowance from \$112/month to \$160/month for individuals living in care homes, nursing homes or other domiciliary hostels.”

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, I add my name to this petition.

VISITORS

Mr Bob Wood (London West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I know the House will want to welcome Suzanne McLachlan, Scott Berry and Terence Nakagawa. They are here for a conducted tour of the Legislature, done by the member for London West. They are receiving that as a result of a substantial donation to the Federated Health Campaign.

1550

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR L’EFFICIENCE DU GOUVERNEMENT

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 13, 2001, on the motion for second reading of Bill 57, An Act to

promote government efficiency and to improve services to taxpayers by amending or repealing certain Acts / Projet de loi 57, Loi visant à favoriser l’efficience du gouvernement et à améliorer les services aux contribuables en modifiant ou en abrogeant certaines lois.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Pursuant to the order of the House dated June 20, 2001, I am now required to put the question.

Mr Newman has moved second reading of Bill 57. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

“Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I would like to request the vote on the bill, An Act to promote government efficiency and to improve services to taxpayers by amending or repealing certain Acts, be deferred until Tuesday, June 26, 2001.” It is signed by the chief government whip. Therefore, that vote will be deferred.

PUBLIC SERVICE STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT À LA FONCTION PUBLIQUE

Mr Tsubouchi moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 25, An Act to amend the Public Service Act and the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993 / Projet de loi 25, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la fonction publique et la Loi de 1993 sur la négociation collective des employés de la Couronne.

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Mr Speaker, I’d like to share my time with the member from Kitchener Centre.

This government continues to meet the challenges of the 21st century. We are committed to the prudent management of the resources entrusted to us by the people of Ontario and to do so in a responsible and efficient manner.

We have made a firm commitment to manage government resources in a more businesslike way, be more accountable and report back on how we manage tax dollars. To give you just a few recent examples, every year since 1995 our government has tabled detailed business plans for each ministry; all business plans have now been tabled for the upcoming year and in fact are now available on our Web site.

Public institutions spend billions of taxpayer dollars every year, yet people have little recourse to ensure that this money is being spent in a responsible manner. That is why we have introduced measures to empower the Provincial Auditor to ensure that institutions funded by the Ontario taxpayers use their money wisely; to require that universities and colleges are now required to provide

students with accurate information on student loan default rates, graduation rates and employer satisfaction rates; and to require school boards to report annually on how they use their funding, and that the results be published.

Bill 25 is also part of meeting the government's commitment. This government has been, and continues to be, a prudent manager of our province's resources. It was our commitment in 1995 and then again in 1999, and it is a fundamental concept in the way we do business. We are obliged to manage the resources in a responsible and effective manner and in a way the people of Ontario not only deserve but have come to expect.

Part of our promise is getting the most value for money spent. That means making wise decisions and sometimes making tough choices. As you know, the province of Ontario offers some of the best services in the world. They are fair, equitable and provide essential elements of what people in this province need. They make Ontario the best place to live, work and do business. But we must not be content with that.

We live in a world that is faster, more dynamic, and which demands more flexibility than ever before. The policies and practices of today's government must meet those challenges or we will all get left behind. To do this, we must modernize the contextual framework in which we operate. The civil service must become the most efficient it can be. We must get more value for our dollar, and we can only do this by taking a comprehensive approach to the way we deliver quality services for the taxpayers, for the people of Ontario.

We need more co-operation, collaboration and a more coordinated approach.

As it exists now, the Public Service Act does not allow the civil service the flexibility to take out the waste that exists in overlap between ministries. Joint ministry programs and offices are just not possible or efficient under the current act. There's no logical reason at all why, and certainly why further savings should not be pursued. This bill, if passed, will improve efficiency, maintain accountability and bring some democracy to the workplace.

I want to address that point in particular, and I want to speak to one of the key components of the proposed legislation: our proposed amendments to the Public Service Act that will increase workplace democracy for the civilian employees of the Ontario Provincial Police.

It is, of course, a matter of fundamental fairness and democracy that employees should have the right to choose which organization will best represent them. Let me emphasize the key word here, which is "choice." The government is not telling a group of employees that they shall belong to this association or that union. It is not telling them they may not be associated with any particular trade union. If passed, this legislation would allow working people a choice. We are saying, "We're not going to state a preference. It is a matter for you to decide, and we want to allow you the opportunity to make that choice."

Let me review for members of the House what this section of the bill means. It would allow civilian em-

ployees of the OPP to evaluate whether their current bargaining unit properly represents them. These employees perform important roles for the OPP, such as forensic sciences, administration and mechanical work. The OPPA will have to show the labour relations board that they have adequate support to bring about a vote on whether the OPP civilian employees want to join the OPPA. If these civilian employees are not happy with their bargaining unit and the OPPA shows the labour relations board that they have sufficient support, they could vote on whether to join the OPPA. Each member would be free to vote their conscience in a secret ballot. It would be a fair process that meets the same standards of the Ontario Labour Relations Act and would be overseen by the Ontario Labour Relations Board. The standards for these employees to leave their current bargaining unit and join the Ontario Provincial Police Association would be consistent with those in the Ontario Labour Relations Act.

As we have stated, the proposed amendments to the Public Service Act will permit civilian employees of the Ontario Provincial Police to join the Ontario Provincial Police Association.

As members also know, this component of the legislation is in direct response to the hundreds and hundreds of OPP civilian employees' requests that have been made. They want to be given the freedom to choose who will represent them. They want to be given more choice about how their relationship with their employer is structured.

This is a unique situation. Civilian employees of municipal police forces are represented by their respective municipal police associations, but the current legislation does not permit a similar situation with the Ontario Provincial Police. In fact, this is the only situation for any police service in this province in which the civilian employees of that police service are not represented by the police association.

By extending workplace democracy to OPP civilian employees in the public service who are currently barred from selecting the OPPA as their bargaining unit, this government is showing that it values an individual's right to choose.

Hundreds of these employees have expressed their wish to have the opportunity to make that choice. If they do choose to go under the OPPA, that would allow them to be in the same situation as their municipal police sector counterparts. Under the Police Services Act, civilian employees at municipal forces are represented by their respective municipal police associations.

At public hearings for this bill, some of the employees told us the OPPA would better represent their interests to the employer. They feel the association more fully understands the unique environment of police services, and they feel they should at least be able to have the choice of which organization represents them. Again, we as a government are not prepared to pass judgment on this. We do, however, wish to provide the employees with the opportunity to choose on their own.

Legislative amendments to the Public Service Act would provide the OPP civilian employees with a democratic choice. It is a matter of fairness and openness in the workplace that employees have the right to be able to choose the bargaining agent that best meets their needs.

1600

This is a proposed updating of the Public Service Act, not a complete overhaul of the legislation. The Management Board Secretariat consulted with the ministries and bargaining units late last year on a number of items that were identified as needing an update. Updating the Public Service Act removes barriers that hinder government and adopts the dynamic needs of the people of Ontario. It enables us to move with the times and establish practices that reflect upon those that are commonly used in the modern workplace.

The changes we are proposing will help the Ontario public service continue to provide the quality service the public has come to expect and which we have promised to deliver.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): On April 30 this year we introduced amendments to the Public Service Act. It has been more than 40 years since the act's last substantial update, and the legislation itself dates back more than 122 years and parts of it no longer meet current and future business challenges. This government recognized that this piece of legislation needed updating to strengthen the efficiency and accountability of the Ontario public service in the modern era. That's why we have taken decisive action to update this act.

As the main legislative framework for human resource management in the Ontario public service, the act sets out the authority for activities in areas such as recruitment, conditions of employment and rules of conduct. It governs the employment of all civil servants, unclassified public servants and crown employees designated under the act.

Accountability defines what good government is all about. Reviewing the Public Service Act and making amendments which support the demands of today's evolving business needs is part of our government's commitment to be more accountable. In the past 40 years the world has changed radically in the way it does business. Partnerships, the use of technology and a fast pace are the norm. If government fails to recognize and adapt to these changes, it fails to meet the needs of the people it serves.

This is part of being accountable. It is making the changes that need to be made to make the best use of the hard-earned tax dollars of the people of this province. After all, we must never forget that the money we spend was earned by someone else: the taxpayer. We must remember that government is here to serve the people, not the other way around. This legislation is action—action to make sure that our workforce is in a position to deliver quality services that the public expects and the public deserves.

Changes in the bill allow for greater delegation of Civil Service Commission and deputy ministers' powers

and duties, including situations where these powers will be delegated to non-public servants. Greater delegation of deputy ministers' powers will remove barriers to cross-ministry initiatives and partnerships with other governments and the private sector. As the government continues to explore partnerships with other governments and the private sector, changes to the Public Service Act will allow the government to become more flexible and remain accountable to the taxpayers.

The efforts we have put forward are substantially updating the act. They will help ensure that proposed legislation supports what taxpayers expect from their government: top-quality services with the best value for the dollar. The legislative changes we are looking at will help the public service deliver the top-notch services the people of Ontario demand. The changes will provide more efficiency and flexibility and ensure that we have a workforce that can respond to changing business needs.

Accountability, efficiency and democracy: they are the cornerstones of these legislative amendments. We cannot meet the needs of the people of Ontario if we are not flexible enough to adapt to their changing needs. We cannot be efficient if we do not modernize employment and recruitment practices. We cannot be democratic if we do not give people a choice.

As you know, the Ontario public service is experiencing challenges attracting and retaining the talented and skilled people we need for time-limited, project-based work. This issue is particularly acute in executive recruitment in specialized areas such as information technology. We have an obligation to recruit and retain the best employees possible to deliver our programs and services. At the same time, we need to have a flexible workforce to support time-limited initiatives. New provisions in the bill will help us do that. They include increasing initial appointments to the unclassified service up to a maximum of three years before renewal is required. Current provisions limit initial appointments to the unclassified service to one year. Increasing the initial term of appointment will make the public service a more attractive workplace to external workers and help us retain the skills necessary to deliver the services the public needs and deserves.

New provisions also include creating a category of term-classified employees. Ministries will be able to hire these employees in exceptional circumstances where highly specialized skills are needed for time-limited project work. These are special positions designed to supplement and enhance the classified public service, not replace it. Term-classified employees may be appointed for up to three years, with the opportunity to renew their contracts for an additional period of time. This will allow ministries to recruit individuals with the required skills and make offers for temporary positions more attractive. Hiring employees for specific terms is an example of how we can remain committed to meeting the needs of taxpayers. By removing unnecessary layers of bureaucracy, we can focus on delivering our services to the public.

What about giving senior bureaucrats the ability to make quicker decisions? Part of the legislative updates to make the Ontario public service more efficient includes providing greater flexibility to civil servants' reporting relationships while at the same time remaining accountable to the taxpayers. This includes situations in which deputy ministers will be allowed, subject to the approval of the Civil Service Commission, to delegate their authority under the Public Service Act to non-public servants. I want to repeat that: it includes situations in which deputy ministers will be allowed, subject to the approval of the Civil Service Commission, to delegate their authority under the Public Service Act to non-public servants.

We are not trying to replace the Civil Service Commission. We are not trying to replace the conditions in the collective bargaining agreements. Currently, a deputy minister may only delegate his or her authority to a public servant in his or her ministry. This limitation was identified as a barrier to cross-ministry initiatives and partnerships with other governments and the private sector. For example, government information centres across Ontario are currently staffed by people from several ministries. Enabling all those employees who work at the same location to report to one supervisor instead of several is common sense. It's what these employees want; it's what the Ontario public wants. They can't understand why you have three or four or five employees all reporting to different supervisors.

I want to be clear: allowing greater delegation of a deputy minister's authority doesn't mean we are reneging on our commitment to be accountable to taxpayers. We may be delegating authority, but our government is still ultimately responsible. In fact, the new provisions in this bill will allow public servants to be managed more effectively when working in these partnership arrangements. The proposed amendments to the Public Service Act will also help us deliver better services to the public. They will assist the public service in delivering services the taxpayers of this province expect and deserve.

1610

The OPS, the Ontario public service, has been experiencing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining managers and skilled workers—and I want to emphasize again skilled workers. These legislative changes will allow us to make more attractive job offers to new workers with the specialized skills we need. Ultimately that means better and more efficient service delivery to the people of Ontario.

Updates to the act include increasing initial appointments to the unclassified service up to a maximum of three years before they are renewed, instead of one year, as I said before, under the present legislation. The bill will create a category of term-classified employees, helping ministries to recruit workers with highly specialized skills for time-limited project work.

Our government has been exploring and continues to explore partnerships with the broader public service and also the private sector. We do that to provide better

service to the people of Ontario and to make sure we are using tax dollars appropriately and effectively. With the creation of SuperBuild, Ontario has signalled its intention to increase its use of public-private partnerships and to provide the best value for Ontario taxpayers. But the civil service can only improve its services if it has the flexibility to build working relationships. We feel these proposed amendments provide the framework of a more flexible, accountable and efficient public service.

Excellence in public service is something our government places a very high priority on. Delivering quality service is something the people of Ontario expect and deserve from their government. We believe the public has the right to expect consistent quality service from the Ontario public service. The public expects the government to be consistent and professional.

Toward this end, the Ontario public service continues to implement a quality service strategy and has established consistent service standards for phones, mail, in-person services and feedback or complaint handling across the public service. Performance against service standards has been and will continue to be measured. In fact, we have taken several steps to improve the way we deliver services. For instance, in a recent independent survey measuring more than 7,000 public contacts with our government, we showed considerable progress in improving service in just one year. We are committed to doing better and expect our dedicated staff to continue to build on improvements in serving our public.

Our government's throne speech implementing the 21 steps into the 21st century outlined specific further action we are taking to improve customer service and to become a world leader in electronic service delivery in order to provide Ontarians with the best possible public services. As part of this commitment we also announced this past April that our government will measure our own performance, including that of our senior management, based on service delivery and customer satisfaction.

The amendments we are talking about today enhance accountability and efficiency in the Ontario public service. They give the government the flexibility to grow our strengths and bring new vitality and wisdom to the services we provide to the public. They are an essential tool that will help us bring the Public Service Act into the modern millennium. They are guaranteed to meet our requirements of customer satisfaction and to meet what the customer is demanding.

I do want to point out that the NDP, when they were in government, commissioned a report in 1992. In 1993 the study found—and I'm going to quote: "Against a backdrop of economic constraint, multiple demands on resources and increasing complexity of our services, we must examine our business practices to ensure their effectiveness and efficiency in meeting our customer service needs. We must find more efficient ways of financing our business by redeployment of resources, by streamlining of organizations and by employing appropriate technology."

"Our vision must be to commit to high-quality service delivery that achieves the best value for tax dollars

anywhere. The leadership challenge to accomplish this mission is large. We must accept it. Ministries and central agencies must work together to set priorities, remove barriers and undertake bold strategies to meet the service expectations of our customers. Ontario's citizens deserve no less."

That report was presented by Glenna Carr, secretary of Management Board of Cabinet, in her foreword of *Best Value for Tax Dollars: Improving Service Quality in the Ontario Government, 1993*. That was during the NDP government. So it has taken eight years for us to get to this point. And what we have found is that in spite of our best efforts in a non-confrontational way, in what should be non-controversial legislation producing what even the NDP government knew, we are finding that the Liberals and the NDP are trying to explain that the sky will fall if we implement these changes.

One of the parts of this legislation—

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): They say that about all legislation.

Mr Wettlaufer: Well, they do. I say to the member from Niagara Falls that they do say that about every piece of legislation we introduce. You're absolutely right.

One part of this legislation deals with allowing the civilian employees of the OPP to select the employee association of their choice. Presently, they must belong to OPSEU. There are 2,500 civilian employees in the OPP. By their own admission during committee hearings last week, 1,000 of the civilian employees have sent letters to the government requesting a change, that being to allow them to join the OPPA. One thousand of 2,500 sent letters asking us to change this legislation.

We understand from a number of them who presented to the committee—Diane Davies, who is a representative for OPP civilian employees at general headquarters, and Cindy Bahm and Yolanda Sunnerton—that they want to join the OPPA and that they represent a number of OPP civilians who support the bill. Basically, they feel they don't have choice, that it's a matter of democracy in the workplace. They also feel, and I'm going to quote from Cindy Bahm's presentation to the public hearing last week, "... the safety of all citizens was jeopardized by a limited number of dispatchers being expected to work beyond their capabilities in addressing reported emergencies and by the lengthened response times of uniformed officers responding to calls for assistance because of picketers preventing safe passage through picket lines." This was during March 1996, when OPSEU insisted they join the OPSEU strike.

I think it's important to remind the two opposition parties, as well as the people of Ontario, that this is about democracy in the workplace. We heard from Leah Casselman and from Denis Perreault, both of whom represent OPSEU. They said that democracy in the workplace would be denied by changing this legislation.

1620

I guess democracy is how they define it if they say democracy is going to be denied, because democracy, we understand, is giving someone a choice, having the free-

dom to choose. Maybe to OPSEU that's not democracy, but certainly to the civilian employees of the OPP it is democracy.

The NDP presented a motion amending the bill, and through some negotiation with the NDP, we did allow that motion. Hopefully, if this bill becomes law, this motion will also be part of the law, and that is that medical information would not be disclosed if that medical information is from a qualified medical practitioner. This is something that both opposition parties had talked about, that they felt that the bill was not clear in disallowing medical information to be disclosed. We accept that, and we've allowed this to go through.

The one thing I did note, both during debate in second reading and also in committee, was that the Liberals presented a number of amendments, but their amendments were all designed to disallow a deputy to delegate any authority to another person or persons. That's bothersome because what this means to me is that they want to continue the red tape and the bureaucracy. In other words, if we have employees from one ministry working in conjunction with another, being transferred into another one, then the new ministry is not going to be able to delegate any power to that individual. In fact, I would say it even goes so far as to say that the new ministry wouldn't be able to supervise that employee. In other words, if we need employees in the new ministry, under the Liberal amendments we would have to hire more employees to serve in this ministry; in other words, increasing the size of the public service again. What does that do? Those positions would tend to be permanent.

We have said we want the ability to hire term-limited employees for up to a three-year period. That will attract some top-quality personnel.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): It's temporary.

Mr Wettlaufer: It is temporary, I say to you. Yes, I say to the Liberals, of course it's temporary. The people of Ontario don't want us increasing the size of the public service unnecessarily. If we only need 50,000 or 60,000 or whatever number of public servants on a permanent basis, why would we increase the size of the public service to 100,000, thereby increasing the cost to the taxpayer for some 30,000 or 40,000 or 50,000 employees? It simply isn't necessary any more to have a bloated bureaucracy in this province—not that it ever was necessary before, except the two previous governments thought it was. We really feel that in order to respond to the demands of the Ontario public, we must have this flexibility.

We did hear a number of other objections from OPSEU and CUPE during the committee hearings. Again, it sounded to me like it was preservation of the status quo. I can appreciate if you have an interest that you want to preserve that, but the status quo is no longer applicable in government. It hasn't been applicable in business for some 15 years. Why would anyone expect that government would maintain the status quo? That's the reason that our taxes were so high in this province.

As a former business person who had a responsibility to employ people and try to maintain their jobs, taxes—taxes—were one of the reasons why I could not necessarily increase my staff. I had to give a lot of consideration before I would take on another employee.

So costs reflect immediately on taxes in this province. We want to provide jobs, and we already know from the experience of the last six years that lower taxes do, in very large part, contribute to increasing the number of jobs; 846,500 net new jobs have been added in this province since 1995. There will be some on the opposite side of the House who will say property taxes are going up for certain people. I would remind you, Speaker, and I would remind them that property taxes aren't set by the government. Assessment may be set by the government, but the tax rates are set by the municipalities, not by the government.

On that note, I will defer.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Further debate?

Ms Di Cocco: It's with great pleasure that I stand and speak to Bill 25, the Public Service Statute Law Amendment Act, An Act to amend the Public Service Act and the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993. This bill does certainly amend the Public Service Act, but it does so to make it easier for the government to contract out parts of the public service to the private sector. Of course, what this means is that there are more public dollars going to private contracting firms. The way our regulations are today, we have no change in the Audit Act which would require that the auditor could see if we do get value for our money. So, we have no ability today in this Legislature to actually get more accountability. I've heard the member from Kitchener Centre consistently talk about accountability, but in actual fact, the more we contract out to the private sector, the less our auditor in Ontario has the ability to actually assess whether or not we're getting value for money.

The issue here as well is that the proposed section 23 of the act extends the deputy minister's power to delegate his or her powers to any public servant or class of public servant or, with approval of the Civil Service Commission, to any other person, and permits the deputy minister to delegate his or her powers under the regulations to make rules and requirements. A deputy minister, in the history of the public service—by the way, which is an honourable history, because there is a great deal of expertise that's developed over many, many years. An ability to be able to delegate powers, and also for regulations, to make rules and requirements, to any other person: how do we know whether or not that person has the expertise to do the job? We don't know that.

1630

I have to say at the outset that we, the Ontario Liberals, definitely oppose the bill. The Harris government consistently is privatizing and contracting out public service, and some of the things, like environmental protection and public safety, in my view are much too important to be dealt with by a private company whose

interest is profit, not necessarily the public good. Let's remember that public dollars are going in to private hands without accountability measures from the auditor. The auditor cannot assess whether or not we have any kind of scrutiny or value for money in this regard.

The words I hear all the time are "accountability," "efficiency" and "democracy." Somehow this government equates changing the rules, privatizing and contracting out with the way to gain these things. Accountability and good government mean that the management of that public service—note the words "public service." They are there to serve the public. Private contractors, in many cases, are not there to serve the public. They have a different quality, if you want. They are there to make money, they are there to make a profit, and they are not necessarily there for the public good. Maybe that might be a result in the long term, I'm not sure, but certainly they do not have the same calling that the public service has.

We talk about attracting and retaining public sector employees. Considering the track record of this government over the past six years, it's no wonder we can't attract and retain public sector employees. This government has shown a contempt for the public sector at every turn. We heard today from the Ontario medical officer of health, and what did he say? That the Premier turned his back on his suggestions, on his advice, because, you see, there is a contempt from this government toward the public service.

They say we have these unnecessary layers of bureaucracy. We know what this government wants to do when it comes to the rules and regulations that are put in place to protect the public interest. What they want to do with that is of course take away all the red tape, because as we've known and as the honourable member Mr Conway suggested, the Red Tape Commission is there to do that, to make it an easy ride and take away a lot of the environmental restrictions so that we can take down barriers, as was stated before. We can remove barriers for those who are polluting, for businesses that are in the business of—hey, importing of hazardous waste is the best one. Let's remove the barriers. After all, we want hazardous waste. We want to do business in hazardous waste. Why wouldn't we? After all, it has no long-term impact.

I wish the minister would come down to St Clair township and take a look at the site that they expanded in 1997, and take a look at what's happening down there without the rules and regulations in place to ensure that the environment and public health and safety are protected.

Again, I will state that unfortunately, with the contents of this bill, all this bill will do, in my humble opinion, is lead to an increase in the number of contract workers employed by the Ontario public service. In my view, it's nothing more than putting out more public dollars to the private sector without true accountability, because there is no ability for the auditor—and I'll say this again: he does not have the mandate to actually ensure that we're

getting service for our money. Unfortunately, the government doesn't really look at the impact of their decision-making when it comes to these things; all they do is look at the bottom line. If the bottom line is suggested to be better, "Let's just throw everything out, and we'll be able to ensure that we can privatize, save money," and the public good goes out the window with that.

I'm going to share my time, and I will leave it at that. The member for Prince Edward-Hastings will continue this part of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): It is my pleasure to speak to Bill 25, An Act to amend the Public Service Act and the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act. Now, the public, when they first read that title, probably say, "That's nothing to do with me; it has something to do with the civil service." I can assure them that if it affects the civil service, it affects the service delivered to them.

I, first of all, wanted to compliment the members of the government on their speeches on this. It must be very difficult to keep a straight face while they're reading some of that material, but they are. They've been able to do it very well. That has to be difficult: to actually appear to condone what they're actually saying.

We hear on every debate with a number of bills how it's going to improve the service. Everything is improving the service to the people of Ontario. I think the people of Ontario need to maybe sit back and say to themselves, "This government has now been in office for six years. Is the education system in Ontario better than it was six years ago?" I would say no; I would say it is in crisis. "Are the hospitals better than they were six years ago?" Actually, there's \$100 million less going into hospitals this year than last, and last year was a crisis. "Is the doctor supply in Ontario better than six years ago?" No. "Is the number of nurses in our hospitals better than six years ago?" No. "Is our drinking water safer than it was six years ago?" No, it isn't. "Is this a better Ontario to live in for persons with disabilities than six years ago?" No, definitely not. "Is the transportation system better in Ontario? Is it easier to drive through Toronto, now that this government has pulled all the money away from the public transit?" No, I think we're seeing gridlock. The one good side, I guess, is that the number of accidents on the expressways is going down because cars that are parked really can't do damage to another car.

"Are the property taxes lower in Ontario than they were before?" No, they're not. I know that we've been assured that the province doesn't set property taxes, or so it would like us to believe; that it just sets the assessment. I can assure the members of the public that this government indirectly very much controls property taxes when they download and download and download to municipalities. Municipalities are faced with mandated services and mandated standards, and they have no choice but to tax to deliver that mandated service.

Property taxes should particularly concern people, because they're insidious in that with income taxes, which is the way we used to pay for ambulances and the way we used to pay for social housing, when a person retires and their income goes down, the income taxes go down. Property taxes are no respecter of a person's income, so an individual who is retiring or is on a fixed income will be faced with the same high level of taxes as when they were working. So it is in fact quite an insidious way of taxing seniors under the guise of calling it property taxes, rather than income tax.

We also hear a great deal from this government about accountability. They're going to make everybody accountable. School boards are going to be accountable. My recollection on my years on the school board was that every year we published full newspaper ads with every financial detail that the board had entered into over the past year. I can also assure you that parents keep schools and school boards accountable. Municipalities are accountable. Municipalities, with their elected councillors, as anyone who's in this chamber who has ever been elected as a municipal official will tell you, the public stops you on the street and either questions you or makes suggestions. They indeed have been very accountable.

It's a smokescreen when this government talks about accountability, because this bill is a privatization bill. As we move toward privatization, we decrease accountability, if for no other reason than that items available that are government operated under freedom of information are not available to the public when they are part of a private corporation. So the public actually has less access to information from this government as the years go by rather than more access. It is ironic to me that as they purport to increase accountability, they in fact are substantially decreasing it.

1640

The other aspect of accountability, if I can again go back to someone such as a councillor or a school board trustee—and we'll focus on council now because school boards lost the ability to reflect their local needs. For municipal councils they dread putting on a tax increase. I don't believe there's any municipal councillor who ever went to a meeting and said, "Let's try to get the taxes up a little bit tonight. I'm interested in some angry phone calls over the next week." Municipal councillors have consistently and without exception striven to keep taxes down.

In contrast to that, a private corporation—this government is wishing to privatize the water supply systems. A member of a public utilities commission or city council did not want to increase water rates because they were accountable to each and every citizen in that community. A private water system, on the other hand, is not at all accountable to the local citizens but is accountable to its owner or shareholders or the out-of-country company that actually owns it. So the accountability is totally eliminated and the pressure to keep rates down is totally eliminated.

If we hear, as we have heard in the last hour, about the advantages of privatization, let's look at how it's worked in the last six years. I think we are best served in where we're going in the future by looking at our history. Let's look at the past six years' history. We have eliminated the public operation of the maintenance crews and the snowplowing on our highways. We've gone to private contractors. It used to be a mix. A long time ago when I was a Ministry of Transportation employee, about 50% of the work was done by public employees and about 50% was done by private contractors, primarily over the winter. When the construction was slow and they had the equipment, they'd come in and plow.

Now we've gone to a privatized operation on it, and the auditor found out that in fact the costs went up by 4%; they didn't go down. I guess there's got to be a profit factor in there. Did the service get better? They drew up a most intriguing contract with the private operators. For one thing, they almost gave away all of the equipment. I don't understand why we had perfectly good equipment that was given to the contractors. Then the contractors entered into an agreement with the province that paid them so many dollars for plowing the snow in winter. It didn't pay them so much per hour, it didn't pay them so much per snowstorm; it simply paid them.

I did snowplowing at one time. When you have a snowplowing contract, if you have a fixed price, either you or the client are going to be beaten. If there's a lot of snow you're going to get beaten; if there's no snow, the client gets beaten. The fairest contract is by the hour. This province entered into it such that the private operators get paid the same number of dollars whether the snowplow ran 24 hours a day or whether it never turned a wheel. That is not fiscal responsibility in any way, shape or form. That's their record on that.

The Ministry of the Environment: we've got an inquiry going on at Walkerton right now to examine the problems that lie with the privatization of that. I think that's enough said.

For the Ministry of Community and Social Services, we are seeing that system now run by a private company. It was called Andersen and they've changed their name, probably to protect something, but they've changed their name. It's an intriguing system there. We've talked to and I've talked to individuals who are employed by community and social services who have come up with a way that would actually improve the service to the clients. But the consulting firm said no, because the improvement would result in perhaps some more money going to children or money going to the disabled. Andersen has the veto control to say, "Our profit comes from the savings on this and we'd sooner the money went back to the US rather than to a child's breakfast." So we're seeing Andersen Consulting making their money off the backs of our vulnerable citizens, and we call this an improvement? Not by any shape or means. That's not an instance I hope this government would ever use as an example of privatization.

Driver testing is going to be privatized, and this government actually had the effrontery to tell employees

of the ministry that they were being laid off before the legislation had even passed. This is democracy in action? I don't think so. They at least should have had the decency to allow it to be debated and then passed.

At the present time, the pressure on these public servants is to make sure that anyone who passes the driver's test is able to be a safe driver on the road, to protect themselves and to protect others. When we look at the American models where they have privatized driver testing, the pressure is to make money; the pressure is to get as many people through—or to get the same person through three or four times. There was a reason that we had the public service in Ontario doing this, as there is for everything.

For our water systems, the supply of water, many of the water systems in the US are private water systems. I accept that; however, a survey I did of the rates indicated that their prices were not anywhere near as competitive as ours are. There are certain basic items that we need to provide to the public, that are an absolute necessity of life. Water should not be a privatized, profit-making item. Water is a necessity for us.

Where we have seen privatization take place that has purportedly saved costs, it has saved costs on the backs of the lowest-income earners in the province. We have seen instances where the government has got rid of employees who cleaned and maintained buildings and replaced them with private firms, and in many cases they turn out to be the same individuals, working for less money. This bill just provides one more brick in the wall that this government is building between the well-to-do and the disadvantaged.

Privatization makes winners and losers. The winners are all too often the large corporations; the losers are the people of Ontario when they lose that valued public service, such as the public ambulances. The ambulance system we have in this province is the envy of the world. No matter whether you're in Kenora or Belleville or Picton or Windsor, you know you have quality ambulance services, with modern, safe vehicles. I shudder when I think of some of the ambulance services offered in some of the US states, but that's where we're going. This government will not allow us to sing O Canada at the beginning of each legislative sitting, but I wonder, if we offered to sing the Star-Spangled Banner, whether it would get approved fairly quickly.

The concept of term employment: are we going to draw the very best people for up to a three-year appointment? I would suggest the very best people are not looking for three-year appointments; the very best people are looking for full-time employment with benefits. So we're going to see a turnover among employees. That's not that we don't have and that we won't attract quality, but I don't believe that's in the best interests.

We also lose something that has not been valued by this government, and that is corporate history. Why do we do something a certain way? Well, if we think of water testing as an example, that was a finely developed and evolved system that came into place, and there were

individuals within the Ministry of the Environment who knew why it was developed that way and why we needed to maintain it. We're losing that.

For a person on a three-year appointment, there is no way they could safely be a whistle-blower. In the US—bless them; at least they're right on this—they have whistle-blowing legislation that protects people. But for someone within the Ministry of the Environment who was prepared to divulge what they believe is an unsafe condition, it will result in non-reappointment at the end of the three years, so it can't be done. It simply eliminates a long-term commitment.

When we look at the other part of it, which is dealing with the collecting of information, this is rather insidious. This deals with collecting personal information from a civil servant. Now, a civil servant is still a full citizen of this province and I would think would be entitled to all the rights and privileges of it. Here we have, "Personal information ... may be disclosed, collected and used under this section only to the extent necessary," etc, but then it says, "A public servant shall disclose personal information about a public servant to a person engaged in providing an integrated human resources program." That could very well be an outside private firm.

The problem with information—probably the most valuable thing that individual owns is their good name and the information about them. If we are unhappy with the way a civil servant administers a policy, if we're unhappy with a policy, we can defeat the government. The people of Ontario have the right at election to call their elected officials to accountability. But a private company is not accountable to the voters of Ontario. So that information has gone into Never-Never Land and, as we've seen with the Province of Ontario Savings Office, once the information is in private hands, it can become, in a sense, public information. So we're seeing a betrayal of the trust that we're entitled to when we give our information to a government that it will retain it and it only will retain it.

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As we see the wedge coming into this and we see that they'll be able to give information about public servants to anyone else and they'll be able to have the public servant information disclosed in the chain that it starts in, it should be absolutely terrifying that this is only the start of medical information or other personal information being distributed.

This bill isn't about serving the people of Ontario, not in any way, shape or form. This bill is about privatization, about rewarding firms and allowing them to make some more money and allowing the rest of Ontario to have their privacy invaded, to have their services reduced, all in the name of more profit for friends of this government. There is no way that this bill should be supported. The people of Ontario should be extremely concerned about it.

I will now pass on for comments to the member for Scarborough-Rouge River.

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River): I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this bill, Bill 25,

An Act to amend the Public Service Act and the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993.

Before I get into the meat of all this, Mr Speaker, let me see if you share my understanding, because the people outside in my constituency and around this province seem to share the understanding that we all are here elected by the people of Ontario. They want us to conduct business in the most efficient and fairest way possible. The fact is, they feel that there are individuals in our community and in our society who are vulnerable to many corporations or institutions that are focused one way, and that is to make profit. They would say there are things that have to happen in our society where the bottom line is not profit. In other words, "I'd like to take my kid to school, but I can't afford it through transportation, so we hope that there's a fair and equitable way that that can be managed," or that, "If I'm drinking the water each day, I'm not dealing with the fact that I have to have money in my pocket or that there's a profit to be made if my water is being distributed and being managed in a proper way."

We are elected to balance that situation, as simple as that. I don't want to get into it in a very complex way. It's a democratic society, and that is what we are doing. It's even going to the point that the Premier of this province has to be elected in his constituency, so that people can say, "I can look straight at Mike Harris," or at whomever the Premier would be, "and say, 'You're accountable for the concerns and the wishes and aspirations that we have in that constituency.'"

Sometimes it's unfortunate that we don't have an accountability session in here where they can be accountable to answer the questions as the people have addressed them to be. Sometimes the people have a concern. As my colleagues from the north would say, many times the Premier himself is wanted even in that area. It's rather surprising. He's not accountable there; he's not accountable here—which is quite something.

Let me just emphasize about the public service, the civil servants. I am one of those who have been subject to seeing the excellent work done by the civil servants of Ontario. As a minister coming in, many people would think that I had the authority, when I was appointed the Minister of Housing, to know it all. That's what the perception is. But because of the excellent civil service that we have, they were here to direct me in a policy way and to guide me accordingly through housing and through other ministerial posts I have been honoured to do.

So civil servants are not partisan. They are much more policy-oriented and they are not confused about ideology of the left, the right or the centre. They are there in a sense for guiding. I want to commend those civil servants who in my time have seen three different ideologies govern this province. They've done an excellent job.

What we have seen lately, though, by this present government is how they have undermined the system and undermined the civil service with a lack of resources and then have turned around and said they are not doing any

work. They don't have any trust in these civil servants, who have been excellent civil servants in the process. I can think of many times, and I know my colleague from Sudbury can recall very much so, when ministers of the Conservative government here have fallen flat on their faces and, thanks to the civil servants, were bailed out by notes slipped through here sometimes so they don't fall on their faces and don't in any way embarrass themselves or renege on their responsibility.

But do you know what? They have found a way in which to avoid all this. They said, "Let's sell off most of what we have. Let's privatize it because it's too much responsibility for us," a responsibility they ran on and campaigned on. During their campaign they said, "You send me to the Parliament and I will look after your concerns and your welfare." They found the responsibilities too much, so they have now decided to find some friends of theirs and say, "This is quite a profitable business we've got here. I'd like to pass some of those responsibilities over to you." I don't want to go into the Andersen Consulting game that went on, but they said, "You know who are the most vulnerable people, the people who can't speak out for themselves. Let's first attack them." Within a couple of days of this Conservative government taking the reins they cut the most vulnerable in our society, cut 22% from their income, and said, "We have done a great job. What we will do with that saving is, we'll turn it over to you for the excellent job you have done, Andersen Consulting."

In the meantime—here is the irony of it and you know that—the irony of it all is that they are saying they were wasting money in there and the money could be better spent. But if we could take it away from them and pay millions of dollars to a consulting company to tell us that we have saved money—and what they have done is given it to their friends. So it started off in that direction.

Let me see if I can really make some sense of what they are doing here. In some part of Bill 25, where they talk about the Ontario Provincial Police's way of bargaining, I almost want to agree with them that there is a process here which could be cleaned up. They haven't done a bad job there, but because of the consulting done by the police, that is a part that made out pretty well itself. But on the other part I am extremely concerned about the privatization that is going on here and the contracting out of services.

I have seen today what we have to speak of so often, the Walkerton situation, and look what has happened. They've tried to privatize it, they've tried to undermine it, they've not given it enough resources and that has caused death, a legacy this Conservative government will carry right through to the day of election, when the people will have decided they cannot give them a mandate any more to look after their lives. But because of their incompetence, they feel they can pass it on to other areas.

One of the wonderful things about the civil service and the process and how it is set up is that whenever there is a breakdown, we know where to go to find out

where the problem is and how it can be corrected. We know which person is responsible, we know which deputy is responsible for carrying out those duties. But today we understand that the jails are being privatized because they have some friends they'd like to pay off. I think it's a big payoff, a huge payoff: "Going to privatize the jails, we privatize the water, we privatize all these things without any consultation"—no consultation whatsoever. The breakdown comes, so that people are looking around to find out who is accountable. I thought the whole process of democracy was accountability. In this House, this government itself has made sure the opposition has the most limited time in which to debate any issues here. They have had more closures here so that those of us who are anxious and eager to do the job of the people who have elected us, to ask questions of the government or pursue in a public way public hearings about legislation—they have shut that down and no consultation happens.

1700

We are seeing right now what is happening in the education business, and gradually they are going to try to privatize that. As a matter of fact, they think they can fool the people all the time, but the people have seen very much what they are doing. But they also feel that by the time they leave office, they could have privatized everything. This is what this Premier has said in his discussions oftentimes, that he's not here to govern and he's not here for government; he's going to make sure there is not very much of government left when he goes.

His ministers will say to themselves that they'd like to create a crisis in order to solve a crisis. You can recall that the ex-medical chief came out very, very strongly against Mike Harris at the water inquiry, where warnings were being given and they ignored them, and here we now are finding many things that are supposed to be available for the inquiry were not given up, and the Premier is saying, "I don't know what else to give." Yet they are finding tons of evidence still that can be aired in the inquiry.

I get very concerned about the direction of this government, because by the time we are rid of them, our children may not be properly educated because they have privatized that; the most vulnerable people in our society who need support from this government have not been helped because their friends who make a profit from the most vulnerable in society are now laughing all the way to the bank. I'm sure by the time the electricity situation is over here and the energy crisis is developed—who will make the money but his private friends who will, of course, be pocketing that money and laughing all the way to the bank?

I'm concerned, and all my colleagues here—Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals here—are extremely concerned that that's the direction, but there is hope. Sometimes the young people here today, our pages, are wondering, "This seems to be doom and gloom." But there is hope. I want to talk to the pages now, because hope lies in the Liberals and you and all the young people

out there. Where hope lies is that there is an alternative to this type of government that wants to privatize everything. The hope lies in that we will make sure that public education is protected. The hope lies in that for the most vulnerable in our society who want to be cared for, which will be the young people's grandmothers or your grandfathers or those who may be lame and sick, there is an alternative, a government called the Liberal Party, led by Dalton McGuinty. Within the time of an election we'll make sure those things that people have fought for in wars, to have democracy, to listen to, will be protected. Yes, there is much damage that they will do, but, like I say to the young people, have faith, because whatever damage the man has done, we the Liberals can correct that.

We have seen the misguided approach by the Conservative Party, completely misguided, and some of them are singing out of the same hymn book, not even sure of what they are supporting. They are just doing it because they feel that one day they will sit in the front seat.

Interjection.

Mr Curling: Dr Schabas has said that Mike Harris has turned his back on health care, on public health. Isn't it awful that a doctor who himself has been a part of this profession, who has lived with it and seen the pain and suffering and who had hope in the government—

Hon David Turnbull (Solicitor General): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's my impression that in debating something like this, the debate should vaguely follow what the bill has to do with. What is being said now has nothing whatsoever to do with the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. As you know, members have a wide range of latitude when debating this issue. The member for Scarborough-Rouge River.

Mr Curling: Let me tell you how close I was to all of this issue, and this is what it is, exactly. The minister himself doesn't seem to identify with that; he doesn't understand that. What I'm trying to say to you is that privatization is causing all that, Mr Minister.

Hon Mr Turnbull: What's that got to do with privatization? Do you know what bill we're debating?

Mr Curling: Let me quote directly what the doctor was concerned about. He said, "The Premier looked at me ... and then he turned away." This is what Dr Schabas said. "As far as I was concerned, the Premier was turning his back on public health." And the minister says how far off I am from debating this bill.

When you send it off to the private sector, who are we going to ask those questions? I am sure Dr Schabas was never able to ask the Premier that, because the Premier would say, "It's not in my hands. I've given it to my friends to do this job." So what about water? "It's not in my hands. I've shunted it off." Or if the jails are not being protected, "It's not in my hands, so talk to my friends." Or if it's the transportation on the highways he may sell off, "It's not in my hands. If the guy's charging you too much money, go to him, because he has to make a profit. Furthermore, we also have to get some money

for our fundraising, and so we will have our fundraising and those guys will contribute accordingly."

So if the minister wants to say I'm far off from the bill, let me tell you, he's far off from democracy, he's far off from accountability, he's far off from being able to defend the most vulnerable in our society and he's far off from actually conducting himself in the manner he was elected to do. He's far off from that. I'm telling you to come on the road where Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals will go. If it isn't now, it will be at the time of the election when the people go in the direction of voting Liberal.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): At the outset, Speaker, I want to let you know that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Kenora-Rainy River.

I want to focus on three issues today in my remarks, but first, obviously I want to say that New Democrats will not be supporting Bill 25. We didn't on second reading; we won't be now.

In essence what the bill does is to facilitate the privatization of government operations, because the bill makes it much more attractive to the private sector to take over the management of government employees. The bill does that because, in one instance, the bill delegates authority now currently in the hands, in most cases, of deputy ministers, of many authorities, to other hands. Those can certainly be other people in the public sector, and no doubt it will be people in the private sector.

The delegation of authority, which for many years has been specifically delegated to deputy ministers, was to assume or to provide for or to guarantee—probably the most important word—a measure of accountability, and accountability from the public back to government, but the government changes that in this bill and will allow for the delegation of authority to other parties. Those other parties can be in the public service; those other parties can be outside the public service. We saw the government do that in 1996, for example, when we were dealing with the Aggregate Resources Act. In that bill the government delegated authority, responsibility, for a number of very important government functions to other parties. I disagree with that move, because I think it clearly undermines the accountability that government should have at the end of the day for the provision of high-quality public service.

When you contract out that responsibility, because that's what it is when you delegate, where does the public go to have its voice heard? Where does the public go to get its issues resolved? Where does the public go when it has concerns with what is happening and the deputy minister no longer has the authority, when it's been delegated to someone else, to a third party, to a private sector party?

There is no accountability when the public has to try and wrangle with someone who has a delegated authority who comes from the private sector, because the private sector's not interested in dealing with accountability; they're interested in dealing with making money. That's what the point of the exercise is for them. So the

government, with the changes it makes in Bill 25, clearly removes an important level of accountability, one that's been in place for a long time. As I say, I think the government does that because it makes it easier to make government services, particularly involving people, much more attractive to the private sector if they know they don't have to be accountable in the same way.

1710

I think the second way the government facilitates privatization, making it more attractive to the private sector—that is, the management of people resources—is the changes the government makes with respect to its own employees. Some of the government members have talked at some length with respect to the change of the definition of “temporary” from one year to three years, and how this will make the management of people resources in the public sector so much more flexible, so much better to respond to the public and public concerns etc. Really—and I will deal with this a little more fully later on—all it does is ensure that the government, and then the public private sector, has much less cost in terms of dealing with issues like pensions, pay, health care benefits etc. This is clearly an attempt by the government to reduce its own costs with respect to its own employees, and then to keep that in play so that as they off-load public services and public assets, those same benefits of reduction in costs to unclassified staff will pass on to their friends in the private sector. I'll deal with that a little more fully in a moment.

This bill is all about how to assist the government in its privatization agenda. The sad part of that is that if you look at some of the assets that have been privatized by this government or some of the public services that have been privatized by this government, it's very clear that there hasn't been a saving to the taxpayer.

I remember the auditor's report that was filed in the fall two years ago. The auditor looked at this government's privatization of highway maintenance under the Ministry of Transportation. The auditor, in his report and in the public hearings that followed that report, while the Legislature was not in session, made it very clear that in his view there had been no savings to the taxpayers of Ontario. In fact, his review, his look at the monies the government disclosed to him—because he had, and he mentioned this in his report, a great deal of difficulty getting financial information disclosed to him to make a proper evaluation—led him to clearly summarize and believe there had been no savings to the taxpayer, and that in fact the maintenance contracts he reviewed gave an added burden, an added expense, to the taxpayers of Ontario. It was why he was so concerned that before the results of the first contract, in the Chatham-Kent area, were ever clearly known to the government, the government went ahead and privatized a number of other areas for highway maintenance. He made it very clear that the government should have looked at the results of that first contract, because if the government had done that in an honest way, it would never have proceeded with further privatization of highway maintenance. There were no

savings to the government, no savings to the taxpayers or the people of this province.

What is even more interesting is that even though the auditor dealt with that two years ago, in recent correspondence we've received from the Ministry of Transportation—the public accounts committee has continued to try to obtain some of the answers, some of the documentation the auditor himself had great difficulty getting, and in some cases never did—when I asked the auditor in committee whether he now felt confident that savings had been achieved, he replied to all the committee that he was very much concerned by recent documents we'd received from the Ministry of Transportation, that again the figures don't jibe and the figures certainly don't show there have been any savings from privatization. The auditor is coming back to the public accounts committee this Thursday to talk to us directly about those concerns. I also understand, because he told the committee, that he has yet another meeting with the deputy to try to go through the numbers one more time.

So here we are, two years later, and the Provincial Auditor, who is a public officer chosen by all this House, continues to maintain there were no savings through privatization of highway maintenance. The extent of the lack of savings still has to be confirmed. Hopefully in the next meeting he's going to have with the deputy, he'll finally be able to get the information he needs to make that conclusion very public.

Let's look at the private cancer clinic the government established at Sunnybrook. We have a scenario before us where the government decided to establish a private radiation treatment facility at Sunnybrook, led by a private sector company, a former public sector employee of Cancer Care Ontario. I have to ask whether there's a bit of a conflict of interest there, but the main point I want to deal with is whether there were any savings here.

My colleague from Beaches-East York, who is our health critic, was very persistent in trying to obtain a copy of that contract and finally was given a copy of the contract—a copy she has asked the minister to release publicly and which he continues to refuse to do today. But it was very clear in questions she raised in this House, after having the opportunity to review the contract, that in fact the government had established guaranteed payments per patient and, over and above that, premiums, given the number of patients the cancer clinic was able to see, which led to some questions about how quickly people were being seen and were you having revolving-door radiation treatments going on in order to increase the premiums?

But it was very clear from the details she provided to us in the House that in fact taxpayers were paying much more for the operation of this private cancer clinic at Sunnybrook than they would have been if Cancer Care Ontario had itself just operated the extended hours at Sunnybrook. I gather they are using any number of the same employees who work during the day for the public sector and then at night for the private sector. But here we are in a situation where, to date, the government

refuses to release the details of the contract. So it's very hard to believe the government, especially the Minister of Health, that there are any savings here. I suspect the reason the document has not been released to date, even though my colleague from Beaches-East York has tried on many occasions to have that done, is because we're paying more, far more, for radiation treatment at this private sector clinic than we would have paid in the public sector.

So there are but two examples, one very clearly documented by the auditor, another very clearly documented by my colleague who has been able to raise some of the details of the contract, that as the government proceeds on its privatization agenda, the taxpayers of this province are not seeing any financial benefits. In fact, what we are seeing is a higher cost for us to maintain assets and public services that people in this province fought together long and hard to build.

The bill that is before us, regrettably, will facilitate the move, the direction of this government—in fact, reinforces that direction even more, makes it much more attractive for the private sector to want to take off government's hands even more public sector services and public sector assets. I resent that, because I think many people in this province fought long and hard to put in place important public services. Those are being sold off to this government's corporate friends, and we see it is costing taxpayers much more to continue to have those services, which they've already paid for, and built, as well.

I want to go back to a point I raised earlier. How does this make it more attractive to some of the government's private sector friends? If you look at the changes the government is making with respect to employees, it's very clear there will be a reduced monetary obligation, certainly on the part of the government right now, and then on the private sector when it assumes some of these services, with respect to personnel, manpower. The government is changing the definition of "temporary" from one year to three. The government is also creating another whole pool or category of persons who are essentially unclassified staff. The net effect of the government's doing that, obviously, is to reduce its own costs with respect to potential pension benefits, health care benefits and salary levels, and then to maintain those reduced costs for its friends in the private sector as well.

A couple of comments in this regard. There's nothing temporary about three years as a temporary employee. It reminds me of the terminology this government uses to defend its cancer re-referral program: it's OK to discriminate against northern cancer patients by ensuring they get less money when they have to travel for cancer care because the government's deluxe plan for southern Ontario cancer patients is only a temporary program.

1720

It's worth pointing out that this temporary program that provided 100% of the costs of food, accommodation and travel for southern patients to access care far from home was in existence for over 26 months. There was

nothing temporary about it. There was certainly nothing temporary about the payments that continued in that course of time. If you look at the payments that were made to the southern patients, they were far in excess of anything that was ever paid to a northern Ontario patient who travelled for cancer care at the same time somewhere in northern Ontario. It's very clear that was discrimination; the Ombudsman has said it is so.

In this case, I look at those employees: there are 10,000 of them now in the government of Ontario who are unclassified who will now have the privilege of being unclassified for three years instead of one. I remember when we became the government, facing a similar situation. The Minister of Natural Resources at the time, my colleague Bud Wildman, came to the ministry and found thousands of employees who had been unclassified, working for the government on a contract—fewer benefits, fewer health care benefits, less pension if they got a pension payout at all—for a number of years: three years, four years, five years.

This was the way business was done in the Ministry of Natural Resources at the time. He came to cabinet and said very clearly, and he was right, "This is very unfair. We have people with a particular expertise. We need to guard that expertise and we should give them some stability of employment in the public service. It is not fair that people providing an important public service, be it firefighting or other, should continue to be unclassified and not have good benefits and the same level of pay as their counterparts in this ministry." At a big expense to the government, we made that change. We made those unclassified staff permanent staff and gave them the benefits and level of pay they were entitled to.

I resent that the government chooses to go down this road, because I think there are many people who, after working two and three years for the province of Ontario, should be permanent staff. I think we need those permanent staff. I disagree fundamentally with the member from Kitchener Centre who says we don't have a need for all these people. Ask people who have been affected in Walkerton if they think we have a need for more MOE inspectors, and I think they'll tell you that we do. Ask those people who are really worried about what the Ministry of Natural Resources is doing or not doing in our forests, and they'll tell you we certainly need more employees.

Not only will they tell you, but the Provincial Auditor told this government too, because in his report that was released last November, when he looked at the forestry division of the Ministry of Natural Resources, he made it very clear that the ministry has absolutely no idea what's going on in the forests of Ontario at this time—no idea, none. They don't have any idea what's going on in the forests with respect to cutting, regeneration, seeding etc, because they don't have enough staff to monitor what needs to be monitored. He made that very clear in his report in November.

We had an announcement by the Minister of Agriculture and Food today about some changes with

respect to food protection. The only problem is that this is the minister who presides over a ministry that has lost over 200 of its food inspectors since the Conservatives came to government, and there is nothing in the bill he introduced in this House today to oblige the ministry to rehire those inspectors or hire new inspectors, to put in place the people who can actually monitor to ensure we have adequate food standards in this province.

It's a shell game the minister played today. It might have been a nice public relations exercise. I guess he's hoping he's going to get a headline or two in the Toronto papers saying the government's doing something with respect to food safety and food standards, but the fact of the matter is that with 200 fewer inspectors in this ministry to deal with food, there's no one in this government who can guarantee the safety of the Ontario food supply, and nothing's going to change with the bill he introduced today, because there's no obligation on the part of the government to hire any of those people back to do the job they should be doing.

If you ask any number of Ontarians in light of Walkerton, in light of what we know about food safety, in light of what we know about the MNR, in light of what we know about any other number of ministries, whether they think we need more temporary staff, one-time only, pay those people less, get rid of them and their expertise after three years, or whether we need to staff up some of our ministries properly to do the job government is obligated to do to protect the public interest and public safety, I think more and more people will agree that we need more public servants to do important work on behalf of the public. They need to be paid for their work, they need to have a pension and they need to have health care benefits. Most of all, we need their expertise to avoid tragedies like Walkerton and others ever again.

Because the minister and the member for Kitchener Centre spoke several times about accountability, I want to make one point about that in the time that I have remaining. Specifically, the member for Kitchener Centre talked about the bill increasing accountability of the public service, that, "Accountability defines what good government is all about." "This government is committed to being accountable," and finally, "Accountability is the cornerstone of these legislative amendments."

The minister, when he spoke, talked about the Provincial Auditor in the context of accountability, but made some specific references to the changes that the government's going to make in the Audit Act to make the auditor more accountable and the spending of public dollars more accountable. I have been looking for a way to raise this, and I'm glad that both the minister and the member gave me that opportunity today, because I've got a letter from the Provincial Auditor with respect to accountability, particularly with respect to his ability as the Provincial Auditor to do the job that he needs to do: to look at the public accounts of the province of Ontario and to make recommendations to the government and to the public about whether or not they got value for money. It was interesting: this letter came to the public accounts

committee, of which I am part, on June 7, from the auditor, Erik Peters, who said:

"As part of my estimates submission, I advised the board"—that's the Board of Internal Economy—of the following: that Ontario "is funded at about one third of the average level of the other Canadian legislative audit offices per \$1,000 of government revenues and expenditures"; and secondly, that the "office's approved staff complement has been decreased ... from 115 to 85, or about 26%, while revenue and expenditure subject to audit has increased by 38%."

The reason we got the letter is that the auditor went to the Board of Internal Economy to try to get an increase in his staff in order that he could do more value-for-money audits, in order that he could be more accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario about whether or not this government was spending their money wisely and properly. The BOIE on June 1 told the auditor, by way of a telephone call, that his request for estimates was not approved but would only be approved at the 2000-01 level, which is an impact of about \$608,000. He said very clearly to the members of the committee, "As a servant of the Legislative Assembly and of the public accounts committee, I consider the inadequate funding provided as interfering with my office's ability to fulfill our responsibilities under the Audit Act in a timely manner and as counter-productive to good public accountability." That was what the auditor had to say to the public accounts committee about his ability to do his job, which is to guarantee value for money with respect to the spending of this government.

I raise this today because as we speak, the auditor has been called back before the Board of Internal Economy and is trying to convince the board members—I shouldn't say "board members," because the Liberals and New Democrats voted in support of the increased funding; it was of course the government members, the Conservatives, who voted down the auditor's request for some increased funding. The board is meeting right now as we speak to have a second look at the auditor's estimates. I hope by the time my colleague Mr Bisson comes back to the House today—because he's our member—he will have some good news to report; that is, if the government really means what it says about accountability, then the government will staff up and fund the auditor's office to the extent that it has to be in order that he can carry out his job.

With that, I'll say again that we will of course be opposing Bill 25. I will allow my colleague from Kenora-Rainy River to make some remarks as well.

1730

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): This is Bill 25, An Act to amend the Public Service Act and the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993. Let me come right to the point: what the government wants to do here, what the government is trying to do, is facilitate the privatization of as many government operations as it can, and it's trying to facilitate the contracting out of as many government services as it can.

I want to talk just a bit about Ontario's experience with privatized public services and contracted-out public services.

The first privatized service I want to talk about is the testing of drinking water. This is quite timely, since in three days the Premier will have to appear before the Walkerton inquiry and he will have to explain his actions or his lack of action in terms of protecting the drinking water of a community where seven people died and over 2,000 became seriously ill as a result of contaminated water. People ought to be thinking about what happened at Walkerton in terms of this legislation. What happened—and more and more of the documentary evidence is appearing—is simply this: this government in 1996 decided that it was no longer going to handle the work of testing drinking water. It was no longer going to have provincially operated laboratories test the drinking water from municipalities across the province. It was going to withdraw from that public service activity and it was going to turn that public service activity over to private water-testing laboratories. Municipalities would then shop around, going to this laboratory or that laboratory, to have their water tested.

We know that in the case of Walkerton, there was actually a changeover from one private water-testing laboratory to another. Immediately after the government privatized this public service, the town of Walkerton engaged a water-testing lab. This water-testing lab was providing water-testing services, and even though they were not bound by law, because many of the people who worked at that water-testing lab were former public servants, they said, as a matter of their corporate policy, that they were going to continue to follow what they knew were the internal government protocols. After about a year, though, they said to the municipality, "We can't afford to continue to do all of these tests, this broad spectrum of water tests, for the money that we're being paid. If this is all you can afford, maybe you should get another company to test your water."

So the municipality retained another company to do the water testing, but that company only tested a narrow spectrum in the potential contamination of the water. Yes, they gave them a better price, but they only tested within a narrow spectrum, and this second company didn't consider itself bound by any of the previous public service protocols. In fact, they did very little reporting of the water test results. They didn't report the water test results, for example, to the local medical officer of health. They didn't report the water test results to the provincial medical officer of health. They didn't pass on the water test results to the Ministry of the Environment.

So what happened as a result of the privatization of this vital public service? I think it's evident what happened. The water tests which began to show bad water, contaminated water, were not passed on to the responsible public officials. Because the responsible public officials didn't know about the contaminated water, many people became very ill—over 2,000 people became very ill—and seven people died.

This is just a brief lesson in the privatization of important—I would say essential—public services.

I want people who might be watching to understand the difference between a public service and a corporate financial transaction. In a public service, the biologist, the scientist who's inspecting the water, is not there to make a profit. He or she is there because they consider a public service to be important and they consider the protection of the public to be important, so they're concerned with fulfilling that public duty.

A private company will tell you, when they hold their annual meeting, their shareholders' meeting, they don't ask questions like, "How well did we serve the public interest this year?" They don't ask questions like, "Did we do any public education this year?" They don't ask questions like, "Did we do any questionnaires to see how the public is being served?" No, that's not what happens at a corporate shareholders' meeting. What happens at the corporate shareholders' meeting is, they ask one question: "How much money did we make this year? What's our profit line? How much money is available for shareholders?" That's the emphasis in privatized public services, that's the emphasis of commercial corporations, not, "Did we do a good job of protecting the public?" not, "Did we do a good job of educating the public?" not, "Did we do a good job of delivering a public service?" None of those questions is even entertained. The priority of a private company offering or providing a public service is a simple question: "How much money did we make?" Protection of the public will probably not even be discussed. If it is discussed at all, it will be discussed after the questions, "How much money did we make? What's the profit? What's the profit in terms of percentage of money expended?" etc.

I think people across Ontario have to ask the question: when it comes to important services like protecting our drinking water supply, when it comes to important public services like inspecting food and ensuring that our food is safe for human consumption, when it comes to important public services like inspecting an elevator in an office tower—an elevator that perhaps 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 people may ride up and down on each day—should those services be turned over to a private organization which is more interested in how much money they can make and decidedly less interested in protecting the public, ensuring the public interest is looked after?

All these questions are things I think the citizens of Ontario ought to be actively considering now, because it's very clear where this government is headed. Their primary interest is: privatize the service and, in privatizing the service, see if you can get the price down, see if you can get the wages paid to the inspectors down, see if you can eliminate some of the inspectors, see if you can shorten the process, simplify the process. And if that means the public is at greater risk, if that means the citizens of Ontario are in fact putting their health and safety at risk, this government is quite prepared to live with that.

In the Walkerton situation, this government decided to privatize that service, the inspection of water. This

government received not one warning, not two warnings, but three warnings that we know of. The medical officer of health for Ontario wrote a letter to the Minister of the Environment and said quite clearly in that warning, "Minister, by selling off the water-testing labs, by turning the testing of drinking water over to private companies, you are putting public health and safety and the environment at risk." What did the government do? They ignored the warning.

The Minister of Health himself wrote a letter to the Minister of the Environment, saying to the Minister of the Environment, "By privatizing this important public service, by turning this important public service over to a private company, for whom protection of the public will not be the number one priority, you are putting public health and safety and the environment at risk." What did the Minister of the Environment do in response to that letter? He ignored it.

We know that in the 1996 the civil servants in the Ministry of the Environment put a warning in the draft business plan of the Ministry of the Environment. They said, "This plan, this strategy to cut the inspection resources, the enforcement resources, the scientific resources of the Ministry of the Environment will put public health and safety at risk." What was the government's response? They not only ignored the warning; they had the warning taken out of that document.

I believe people across Ontario, in the context of this next piece of legislation, should be asking themselves, "How much of our public safety are we willing to put at risk? Are we willing to put our drinking water at risk? Are we willing to put the food we eat at risk? Are we willing to put, for example, the elevators people rely on to get to work at risk?" If people are willing to put them at risk, we need to ask, "What happens when something goes wrong? What happens when there is contaminated water? What happens when there is food which is not fit for human consumption and people become very ill and die? What happens when there's an accident in an elevator and, say, 40 or 50 people happen to be riding in that elevator and many of them are seriously injured?" Are we willing to countenance in this province that level of risk? Are we willing to put at risk the lives of people across this province? If so, what's the goal?

1740

This government has been very clear in every budget they announce that their priority is more tax cuts—in this last budget, \$2.5 billion of increased tax cuts for corporations. I doubt very much there's a corporation in Ontario that needs a tax cut, but they've made it very clear, at the same time that this government is going to privatize and contract out more public services, put public safety at greater risk, that their priority in terms of the expenditure of money is to expend the money on corporate tax cuts.

I think people across Ontario have to say if more tax cuts for corporations is a greater priority for them as compared to protecting the health and safety of the

people of Ontario. Are corporate tax cuts, \$2.5 billion of corporate tax cuts, more important than the efficient, effective and safe delivery of important public services? Let me say I have no doubt that many of those corporations would say, "I'll take the tax cut, and public safety, well, that's not really my responsibility, that's not really my concern." That's what I would expect from those corporations. That is their perspective on the world. But in that context, you have to ask, where really is the government of Ontario? Does it really take its responsibility to speak for the public interest, to speak for the protection of the public, to speak for the protection of the citizens of Ontario, seriously? If you look at the historical record, if you look at this bill, people can only conclude that this government is absent from its post. It doesn't take that responsibility seriously.

I want to speak about one other initiative of what I would call privatization or contracting out which is in the process of happening, and that is ambulance services. We have had in this province, for the most part, a provincial responsibility for ambulance services. Ambulance services are an emergency service, making sure that people who are sick or injured can get to a hospital and making sure that people who are sick or injured receive that first response in terms of emergency services. This government, once again in the interests of cutting the cost, reducing the wages and doing away with the responsibility, has effectively said that there will no longer be a provincial responsibility for ambulances. Now the responsibility for ambulances will be pushed on to municipalities. Municipalities will be the first to tell you that in many cases they are not geographically situated to handle the responsibility, they are not administratively situated, they are not historically experienced, and that for a whole host of reasons they shouldn't have this responsibility.

But once again, this is not about creating a better service, this is not about creating a more responsible or accountable service, this is not about creating a more efficient or effective service for the public; this is about a government that says, "Our real priority is tax cuts. Our real priority this year is \$2.5 billion annualized tax cuts for corporations." If an emergency service like ambulances has to suffer in order to find the money to finance these corporate tax cuts, then this government is prepared to move down that road without a second consideration, without even a whisper, without even a pause to reflect. They're prepared to sacrifice, they're prepared to open up all sorts of risk, they're prepared to basically preside over the disintegration of a coordinated ambulance service, because that's not their priority. Their priority is finding the money to finance more corporate tax cuts.

Once again I would say to people across Ontario, look at this agenda very quickly. Look at it and think about it in terms of your community. Think about it in terms of your family. Are you going to be served by a further \$2.5 billion in corporate tax cuts if the cost of that is putting more and more of our important public services at risk, if

the cost of that is the disintegration and the shredding of public services that we rely upon in terms of protecting our drinking water, in terms of protecting the quality of the food that we eat, in terms of protecting and ensuring the safe and efficient operation of many of the other services that a modern society must rely upon? That I think is the measure for people.

Whose interest is really being served here? Who will benefit from corporate tax cuts? Who will have to pick up the pieces of contaminated drinking water? Who will have to pick up the pieces of food inadequately inspected? Who will have to pick up the pieces when an elevator that's inspected by a private operation rather than by a public servant simply doesn't meet the standards any more and fails? All of those things are what's at stake here.

The government may say, "Oh, this will only move a few civil servants over there and a few civil servants over there." That again is typical of how this government operates. It will say, over and over again, "We're really dealing with a small problem here, a small problem there," without ever completely acknowledging what the big agenda is.

I think it's become clear now what the big agenda is. Protecting the public isn't important. Ensuring that the public has good, quality public services isn't important. Ensuring that there's a coordination of those public services so that they work effectively, efficiently and dependably for people is not important. All of those things this government is prepared to sacrifice over and over again to finance its tax cuts for the well-off.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, to be able to wind up the debate with the last four minutes or so here. Just listening to the leader of the third party, the member for Kenora-Rainy River, everything I was hearing from him is that he's opposed to tax cuts, he's opposed to saving money. I don't think there's ever been a tax that he hasn't liked. He seems to like every tax that's going, and if you try to reduce some, he's absolutely opposed to it.

He also talked about being absent from the post. I can tell you a party that was absent from the post for five years in the early 1990s when the debt in this country doubled and spending went up. They keep bemoaning that they were into a recession. No wonder they were into a recession: they created most of it with their irresponsible spending right at the beginning. They were going to spend their way out of the recession. Lo and behold, it certainly did not work very well.

He also talked a lot about how privatizing and contracting out were a big thrust of the government. You'd think from his comments that he disliked every private company out there, that nobody could do a job and that all those people—the unionized people—who work for those companies have to be wrong and have to be bad people. I just fail to understand, when the unions support their party so much, that he'd be so opposed to private

companies that hire unionized workers to do some of these projects.

The current thing for governments to be doing, and it's around the world, is reinventing government. It's out there to steer, not necessarily to row. The government has a responsibility. Can they delegate the authority to have some of this carried out? Absolutely, but you wouldn't think so from what we were hearing from the member for Kenora-Rainy River.

Similarly, the member for Nickel Belt talked about higher costs to the taxpayer. I'm rather confused at this higher cost to the taxpayer, when in fact revenues have gone up \$15 billion since we took office. That's in spite of tax cuts. Maybe I shouldn't say in spite of but because of, because that's what stimulated the economy. Certainly it has responded, as you can see the kind of revenue that's coming in because almost a million more people are out there working, almost a million more people are out there buying goods and services where the provincial sales tax is being paid.

Also, listening to the member from Sarnia-Lambton, who talked about the more that's privatized, the less it can be looked into, referring to the auditor, well, certainly, as you get more and more there's only the one auditor and the one office. But our government is taking measures to increase accountability at all levels of our transfer partners, and there's just no question that accountability is improving. During that lost decade, it was something that the opposition parties were not considering at all as to accountability and what should be happening, as you would have some private industry carry out some of the government activities.

There's no question that government has a role to play, particularly in providing services, as we start out into new ventures, into new areas that may not necessarily be cost-effective for private industry to be involved in, but once that kind of thing is established and it's rolling and it becomes routine, there is no reason in this world why that can't be run by private enterprise.

Just a comment, something that I have noticed, and that has to do with attracting quality staff, particularly in the area of science. This bill is going to be very helpful whereby you can have some flexibility in setting different classes and you don't have to promote scientists into areas of administration so they can get a better level of remuneration. That level of remuneration can be established for the technical ability. That's been one of the big problems in attracting scientists to our system. We have remarkable scientists in our various laboratories throughout Ontario, but with this flexibility the remuneration will be better aligned to their ability rather than having to promote them into administrative responsibility.

For those various reasons, I can enthusiastically support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to the order of the House dated May 30, 2001, I am required to put the question.

Mr Tsubouchi has moved third reading of Bill 25, An Act to amend the Public Service Act and Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, 1993. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Call in the members; this will be a five-minute bell.

I have a letter from the official opposition chief whip asking that the vote be deferred until tomorrow afternoon during deferred votes.

It being very close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45 of the clock this evening.

The House adjourned at 1753.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Règlements et des projets de loi d'internet privé**

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